

# **THE LOST PROVINCE**

**EXPLORATION, ISOLATION, INNOVATION and DOMINATION  
in the MOUNT LYELL REGION 1859 – 1935**

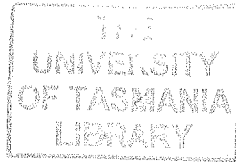
**by**

**LOU RAE**

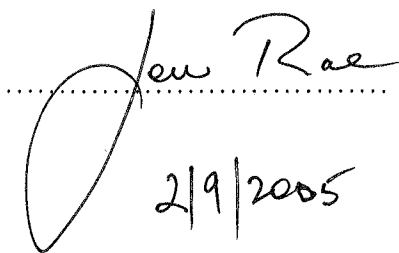
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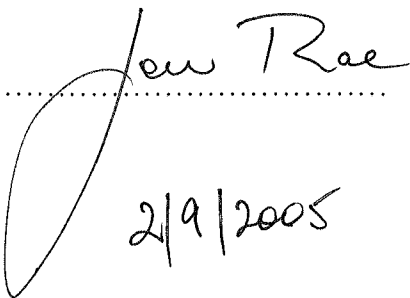
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis evolves around four principal themes, those of exploration, isolation, innovation and domination. The Lyell region's rugged landforms, harsh climate, luxurious vegetation and difficult access by land and sea proved significant barriers for the early explorers, prospectors and settlers. Despite the numerous challenges and privations, the land was eventually opened up to industry and permanent settlement. The region's relative isolation from bureaucratic supervision, general "outside" contact and distant metal markets all combined to foster a high degree of resourcefulness and innovation amongst individuals, communities and companies alike. Through inspired leadership and the adoption of innovative practices the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company grew to dominate the region, to the extent that in 1935 it was the single most important industrial operation in Tasmania.

The period of study begins in 1859 with the first serious mineral expedition to the Mount Lyell region by Charles Gould. Despite great expectations, Gould failed to find payable deposits of gold. Travel to and about the Mount Lyell area was extremely arduous, the rugged terrain, wet climate and dense vegetation combining to make life very difficult for those venturing into the region. Over the next two decades the area attracted little interest. It was not until mineral discoveries occurred elsewhere on the West Coast that prospectors returned to the creeks and rivers about Mount Lyell. Eventually, encouraging gold discoveries followed but the sheer isolation and the lack of an adequate means of transport thwarted development of the field.

By 1892 a number of gold mining ventures had failed through the lack of capital, inappropriate recovery methods and an inability to resolve the transport issue. An ambitious proposal the year before to improve access into Macquarie Harbour had been rejected by Parliament. It was feared the larger steamers would divert West Coast trade away from Tasmania and local industries and shipping services would inevitably suffer. Melbourne stood to prosper through the capture of the West Coast produce. The region was very much at the crossroads. It required major innovation to overcome its inherent difficulties.

Chapter Two covers the roles played by executives from the Broken Hill Proprietary mine who had shown great interest in the apparent large deposits of copper which had been overlooked by all and sundry. Through importing skilled experts to examine and report on the orebody, the true potential of the Mount Lyell region began

to be realised. Under the guidance of its first two managers, Robert Sticht and Russell Murray, the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company blossomed. Many difficulties and challenges were encountered along the way, which required significant innovation and a certain amount of good luck. Unfortunately, the unchecked development came at a cost, the environment being substantially degraded by the large-scale mining, smelting and timber cutting activities.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal with access to and about the region. The first of the transport issues needing to be resolved was the improvement of shipping to Macquarie Harbour, the only all-weather port on the West Coast. Government procrastination, competition from ambitious railway consortia and a lack of understanding of the size of the problem saw ad hoc improvements generally fail to cope with the region's shipping needs. Eventually, substantial innovative harbour works were implemented and the area blossomed to the extent that four separate wharf facilities were developed within Macquarie Harbour. Melbourne had captured the region's trade.

Tried and trusted as a practical means of opening up the other regions within the Colony, the development of an arterial network of roads about the Mount Lyell region failed dismally. Unable to cope with the difficult country and wet climate, the roads proved costly to build and maintain and could not cope with the heavy transport on offer. The Government did employ a program of cutting exploration tracks and developing packing tracks with some success, its intent both to provide prospectors with the opportunity to access the more remote districts and to enable provisions and stores to be carried in to the developing mines and towns. Motorised transport was very slow to develop on the West Coast, mainly through lack of roads and facilities. Ultimately, road construction and motor vehicle technology improved to such an extent, a road between Hobart and Queenstown was finally opened in 1932. The effect was profound, the lost province was returned to Tasmania, the stranglehold of Victorian business now capable of being fully challenged.

Proving to be very successful on the West Coast in the 1890's was the development of railways and lightweight steam tramways. Unfortunately, as far as the Mount Lyell Company was concerned, it was not able to build a conventional railway as the terrain between Macquarie Harbour and Mount Lyell had proven unsuitable. In an innovative approach to the problem, the Company employed an Abt System, the first of its kind in Australasia. Despite major criticism and considerable shareholder concern the railway proved to be very profitable, to the extent the Company withheld the true

figures from a skeptical community and the Government. The unique railway survived competition from marine, road and other railway competition.

Chapters 6 and 7 explain how the Mount Lyell Company and the various communities dealt with isolation and the debilitating effects of climate, pollution and lacking amenities. Throughout the many small settlements people adapted and became innovative to survive in the hostile environment. Storms and fires created significant problems but the people were resilient. It was a man's world but mining was not an easy occupation and it was initially very difficult for the Mount Lyell Company to retain reliable, skilled staff in the district. The Company had to also cope with a strong union presence and the arrival of a number of migrants, who did not readily acclimatise into the workforce or the communities. Through the introduction of a series of innovative welfare initiatives the Company was able to foster community spirit and build a strong and reliable workforce.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
Metric Conversion	vii
Maps and Diagrams	ix
Photographs	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1      Terra Incognita – An Era of Challenges 1859-1892	16
Chapter 2      Mining, Management and Environment 1893-1935	80
Chapter 3      Sailing into Difficulty 1893-1935	142
Chapter 4      Tracks and Roads - A Slow Beginning 1893-1935	193
Chapter 5      We Find a Way or Make It – Rail Systems 1893-1935	247
Chapter 6      Overcoming the Odds 1893-1935	302
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Conclusion	392
Bibliography	400

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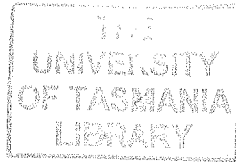
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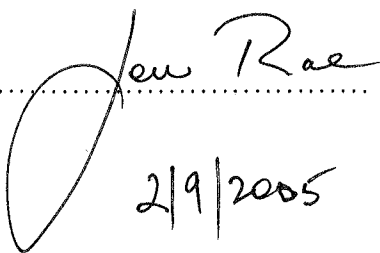
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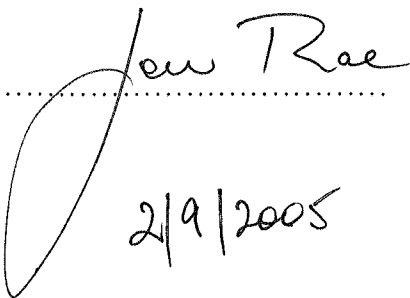
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figures from a skeptical community and the Government. The unique railway survived competition from marine, road and other railway competition.

Chapters 6 and 7 explain how the Mount Lyell Company and the various communities dealt with isolation and the debilitating effects of climate, pollution and lacking amenities. Throughout the many small settlements people adapted and became innovative to survive in the hostile environment. Storms and fires created significant problems but the people were resilient. It was a man's world but mining was not an easy occupation and it was initially very difficult for the Mount Lyell Company to retain reliable, skilled staff in the district. The Company had to also cope with a strong union presence and the arrival of a number of migrants, who did not readily acclimatise into the workforce or the communities. Through the introduction of a series of innovative welfare initiatives the Company was able to foster community spirit and build a strong and reliable workforce.

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Chapter 7      Civilising the Frontier 1893-1935	342
Conclusion	392
Bibliography	400

## METRIC CONVERSION

### Length

1 inch	25.4mm
1 foot (12 inches)	.3048m
3 feet (1 yard)	.9144m
1 chain (100 links)	20. 12m
1 mile (80 chains)	1.6093km)

### Area

1 acre (4 roods)	4047m <sup>2</sup>
2.471 acres	1 hectare
640 acres (1 square mile)	259 ha

### Mass

1 pound (16 ounces)	.4536 kg
1 hundredweight (112 lb)	50.8 kg
1 lb/yard	.496 kg/m
1 ton (20 cwt)	1.0160 tonnes

### Volume

1 cubic yard (27cubic feet)	.7646m <sup>3</sup>
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### Currency

1 shilling (12 pence)	10 cents
1 pound - £1 (20 shillings)	\$2

## ILLUSTRATIONS

<b>Maps and Diagrams</b>	<b>Page</b>
Map 1 - General Location Map	1
Map 2 – Strahan and Macquarie Heads Area	16A
Map 3 – Queenstown and King River Area	16B
Map 4 – Kelly Basin and Darwin Area	16C
Map 5 – Gould’s Second Expedition, Mount Lyell Region 1862	22A
Map 6 – Macquarie Harbour Area October 1881	32A
Map 7 – CP Sprent’s Sketch of Smith Cove, October 1881	37A
Map 8 – King River and Mount Lyell Goldfields 1889	43A
Map 9 – Plan of Strahan Foreshore Developments, June 1891	73A
Map 10 – Mount Lyell Locality and Railway, March 1896	80A
Map 11 – Plan of the Mount Lyell Company’s Leases, March 1898	99A
Map 12 – Tramways around Lynchford, February 1902	133A
Map 13 – Mount Lyell Mining Field, 1900 – 1910	194A
Map 14 – Proposed West Coast Road, WU Paton 1920	238A
Map 15 – Location Map of West Coast Railways and Tramways	281A
 <b>Photographs</b>	 <b>Page</b>
William McDonough – Co-discoverer Iron Blow Mine	41A
Michael McDonough - Co-discoverer Iron Blow Mine	41A
Signal Station and Breakwater – Macquarie Heads, c. 1910	54A
<i>SS Meteor</i> at Smith Cove Jetty	54A
Robert Sticht – Manager Mount Lyell 1897-1922	88A
Russell Murray – Manager Mount Lyell 1922-1944	88A
Mount Lyell Smelters – c. 1896	91A
Mount Lyell Sawmill and Recreation Ground – c. 1896	91A
Mount Lyell Mine (Iron Blow)	95A
North Mount Lyell Area – c. 1898	95A
Lake Margaret – c. 1914	105A
Lake Margaret Power Station – c. 1914	105A
Workers’ Train at Queenstown – c. 1927	118A
Underground Electric Locomotive near Smelters – 1930	118A
Mount Lyell Smelters – c, 1905	129A
Queenstown Recreation Ground – c. 1940	129A
Mount Lyell Haulage – c. 1898	134A
Entrance to Macquarie Harbour, Looking East	142A
Entrance Island and Lighthouse – c. 1900	142A
Macquarie Harbour Bar Delegation 1898	150A
Outer Harbour Quarry, Breakwater Works 1901	150A
Strahan Wharf – c. 1901	176A
Regatta Point Wharf – c. 1935	176A
West Pillinger and Railway Wharf, c. 1902	187A
Kelly Basin and Main Wharf – c. 1902	187A
Road Queenstown to Gormanston – ’99 Bends’	231A
General Office and Assay Office – c. 1900	231A
<i>Mercury</i> Car in Queenstown after opening of West Coast Road, 1932	242A
Official opening of West Coast Road, 19 November 1932	242A

Dubs No. 1 Abt System Locomotive	250A
Abt 1 in 20 Grade and King River Gorge	250A
Construction 'Quarter Mile Bridge' – c. 1897	259A
Quarter Mile Bridge and Abt Locomotive – c. 1897	259A
Laying of Rack Rail on Abt 1 in 20, Dubbil Barril to Rinadeena	262A
Construction Works on Abt Railway, King River – c. 1896	262A
Positioning Iron Bridge at Teepookana – September 1899	267A
First Mount Lyell Picnic, Teepookana – 4 December 1897	267A
Railway Workshops, Mount Lyell – c. 1900	274A
Newly built Carriage at Queenstown – c. 1898	274A
Krauss Locomotive on Tramway Construction Works – c. 1896	279A
Abt Locomotives working the Rack Rails	279A
Bench Working at Mount Lyell Mine – c. 1902	296A
10 Ton Krauss Locomotive at Mount Lyell Works – c. 1920	296A
Dust and Smoke at Queenstown – c. 1898	303A
Tornado Damage, Queenstown – October 1918	303A
Queenstown Band, Intercolonial Champions – 1897	317A
The Strahan Brass Band – c. 1899	317A
Queenstown Parade, Relief of Mafeking – 18 May 1900	318A
Parade Main Street of Queenstown – c. 1935	318A
Strike at North Mount Lyell Mine 1911	328A
Funeral Train Queenstown, 1912 North Mount Lyell Disaster	328A
New Company Houses at Gormanston – c. 1920	334A
Social Club for Workers, Queenstown – c. 1920	334A
Penghana Township – c. 1896	345A
Penghana and Mount Lyell Company Smelters – c. 1896	345A
Queenstown – c. 1896	348A
Queenstown Station – c. 1902	348A
Robert Sticht's House 'Penghana' at Queenstown – c. 1902	350A
Queenstown – c. 1899	350A
Lynchford Hotel and Railway – c. 1904	356A
Halls Creek and Newly Built 1 in 16 Grade Abt Railway	356A
Peters Street, Gormanston – c. 1895	358A
Gormanston – c. 1925	358A
Linda Township – c. 1904	365A
Linda Town and Railway Station – 1901	365A
Town of North Lyell in Snow – c. 1902	369A
North Lyell, Looking Towards North Mount Lyell Mine – c. 1900	369A
Lyell Comstock Works – c. 1927	373A
'Valletta' – Temporary Town for Maltese – Howard's Plains	373A
Construction of Crotty Smelters – 19 August 1902	380A
Crotty Town and Smelters from Railway – c. 1902	380A
Picnic Train at Rinadeena – 5 December 1897	383A
Dubbil Barril, at Base of 1 in 20 Abt – c. 1905	383A
Construction Village of Camp Spur – 1896	384A
The Busy Port of Teepookana – c. 1897	384A
Lowana Sawmill Siding, on Lettes Bay – c. 1910	385A
Regatta Point Station – c. 1935	385A
Strahan Foreshore – c. 1900	386A
Palace Hotel, Strahan, Venue for Celebrations March 1897	386A

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
DPIWE	Department of Primary Industries Water & Environment
HRA	Historical Records of Australia
HAI	House of Assembly Journals
JPPP	Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament
LCJ	Legislative Council Journals
LRRSA	Light Railway Research Society of Australia
MLMRC	Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited
NS	Non State Records
THRA	Tasmanian Historical Research Society
TGR	Tasmanian Government Railways
USSCo.	Union Steam Ship Company





MAP 1 – GENERAL LOCATION MAP

## INTRODUCTION

The opening ceremony of the Mount Lyell Company's Abt railway, held in Queenstown on 29 March 1897, heralded a watershed for the Lyell community. Marion Sticht, wife of the Company's metallurgist, Robert Sticht, expressed her satisfaction at the completion of the 'civilising factor – the railway.'<sup>1</sup> The application of the word "civilising" is wide-ranging. Apart from the physical sense, it is likely that Marion Sticht viewed the completion of the railway as the catalyst for much-needed cultural, scientific, religious and government reform. The time was opportune for the community to replace its savage and isolated past with an enlightened and refined social order.<sup>2</sup> Factors retarding the general advancement of the region included the harsh geographic environment, substandard living conditions and the lack of connection and identity – a sense of place. The region had effectively become a detached province, its governance and civic support provided from Hobart, while its growing economic and cultural connections lay in Victoria. This deteriorating scenario was viewed with concern by government and the Hobart business community. It became increasingly difficult for other Tasmanian regions to compete for the West Coast trade. Robert Sticht considered the trip aboard the small boats to Hobart to be disagreeable, whereas the larger boats on the Melbourne run were far superior and made regular crossings.<sup>3</sup>

The innovative Abt railway negated the physical constraints imposed by the local landforms and wet climate. Marion Sticht could now travel in civilised comfort. The railway had replaced the gruelling twenty-six mile trip by dray track. It was deficient to the extent that Robert Sticht considered the track could barely handle 100 tons of freight a month.<sup>4</sup> The ongoing expansion of rail and tramway systems about the West Coast continued to reduce the isolation for many of its communities. By December 1900 through travel to the port of Burnie was achieved, further shortening the route to Melbourne. For those wishing to travel overland to the Island's eastern seaboard, the sojourn was made via the arduous overland track 'from Lyell to civilisation.'<sup>5</sup> Tracks and roads had limited application as they were expensive to construct and maintain. They were frequently reduced to boggy mires after rain, which was a frequent

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<sup>1</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 April 1897.

<sup>2</sup> Civilising: 'bring out of a savage state; elevate in social and individual life; enlighten; refine.' *Macquarie Dictionary*, NSW, Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, 1982, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> R Sticht letter to FG Ayres, 17 December 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, Non-State Records (NS) 1711/311, p. 235, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>4</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1896, pp. 17-18, Queenstown.

<sup>5</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1895.

occurrence in a region where the annual rainfall for Queenstown was 98 inches, Gormanston 115 inches and Lake Margaret 142 inches.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of the railway's opening, domestic conditions about the Lyell region could not be described as civilised. Over the two years following their arrival from America, the Stichts were confronted by many new challenges, many being foreign to their previous experiences, and most considered uncivilised. Living conditions in the smelter's village of Penghana were primitive and cultural activities sadly lacking. The town had acquired the reputation as a wild-west outpost, featuring beer halls, drunken men, fights and a motley collection of buildings 'thrown down in a most indiscriminate style upon either side of the road, without any regard to uniformity of shape, style, or architecture.'<sup>7</sup> Roads, schools, public buildings, water and sanitary services about the district were deficient. In 1897 there were fifty-seven cases of typhoid in Queenstown, the third highest in Tasmania.<sup>8</sup>

The wet weather presented difficulties. Robert Sticht complained of lost construction time while building the smelters. Heavy rain had lasted weeks at a time.<sup>9</sup> Areas of Penghana were swamped by floodwaters only two days<sup>10</sup> before the Stichts moved into town.<sup>11</sup> With Robert working long hours,<sup>12</sup> combined with the impact of the severe climate, Marion would have endured considerable periods of confinement in her 'neat but small cottage.'<sup>13</sup> In the summer months strong winds and bushfires plagued the region. Unprepared, and with little warning, the Stichts and fellow Penghana residents endured a major blaze on 12 December 1896 that swept through the shanty settlement and destroyed 100 homes, shops and tents.<sup>14</sup> Airborne pollution from the Company's smelters had become a significant problem. The deleterious effects of the sulphur fumes were painfully obvious within months of the smelters' completion. By October 1896 all nearby forests, ferns and undergrowth had died.<sup>15</sup> The need for a 'civilising factor' was apparent to the Stichts. Robert Sticht had sought to secure

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<sup>6</sup> C Whitham, *Western Tasmania: A Land of Riches and Beauty*, Queenstown, Robert Sticht Memorial Library, 1948 (reprint of 1923 version), p. 49. The figures have been rounded to the nearest whole inch.

<sup>7</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 August 1895.

<sup>8</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Central Board of Health: Report for the Year 1897, 1898, paper 44, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> R Sticht letter to Board of Directors, 27 April 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 7, AOT.

<sup>10</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 May 1895.

<sup>11</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 14 May 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p.14, AOT.

<sup>12</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 262.

<sup>13</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 February 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 December 1896.

<sup>15</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 October 1896.

increased annual leave for his staff to enable them to temporarily escape 'the awfulness of this spot as an abode.'<sup>16</sup>

In a physical sense, the railway had proved the civilising factor. Once completed the Company's mining and smelting operations were brought into full production. As the Company prospered, so did the region. Industrial, commercial and residential development boomed. Social amenities, community services and general infrastructure were established. Within two years of the railway's opening the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* noted the transformation of Queenstown, observing it was now 'peopled by a community which for progressive ideas, business energy and general go-aheadism, will compare favourably with any mining community in Australia.'<sup>17</sup> The region had begun to shed its wild-west image, with the hills and valleys now viewed for their mineral potential rather than as a preventative against escape. Unfortunately for the Hobart business interests, the ongoing improvements to rail and shipping infrastructure only compounded the preference for Lyellites to travel to Melbourne and they accelerated the ongoing severance of commercial, cultural and social ties with the rest of Tasmania.

The potential loss of the West Coast trade to the mainland had been identified back in 1890, at the time the Macquarie Harbour works were first mooted. The anticipated use of larger vessels promised to draw the majority of freight away from the smaller local steamers that plied the Tasmanian ports.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent attempts to construct the Great Western Railway between Hobart and the West Coast, and build smelters on the banks of the River Derwent, were deliberate attempts to arrest the loss of commerce, trade and business that was slowly filtering away to Victoria.<sup>19</sup> The bond between Victoria and the West Coast strengthened, to the extent that twenty years later Andrew Lawson, the Queenstown Warden, observed that the region was 'rather a suburb of Melbourne than part of Tasmania.'<sup>20</sup> When investigating the need to build the road to the West Coast in 1920, Alex Marshall, Chairman of the Select Committee, fully endorsed Lawson's sentiments. He found there was good reason to consider the West Coast as Tasmania's lost province, advising 'the existing means of communication are such that the trade relations and general intercourse between the West Coast and the rest

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<sup>16</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 June 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 517, AOT.

<sup>17</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 January 1899.

<sup>18</sup> JPPP, The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1891, paper 116, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> JPPP, The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore Reduction Company's Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1896, paper 80, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

of the State are of a very limited nature.’<sup>21</sup> Not until the completion of the Hobart to Queenstown road in 1932 were the State’s social and commercial ties restored with the Lyell region and the area finally ‘reclaimed as a province of Tasmania.’<sup>22</sup> Russell Murray, General Manager of Mount Lyell, and Warden of Gormanston, observed that the road would bring ‘many advantages and do much to alter our outlook with regard to the rest of Tasmania.’<sup>23</sup>

This aim of this thesis is to provide a history of the development of Tasmania’s lost province, the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region, during the period 1859 to 1935. During 1892 the activities and operations of the precursor to the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company become inextricably linked to the advancement of the region, to the extent the new Company rose to control all and sundry. The Company’s meteoric rise to dominance and its ongoing survival were pivotal to the region’s economic success. To achieve this outcome the Company rejected established practices and conventional methodologies. It pioneered innovative measures to treat its complex copper ores and overcome road, rail and sea transport issues. It countered the debilitating effects of poor climate and lack of facilities in order to retain a permanent workforce. The Company, initially unwillingly, came to control the urbanisation of the region. The thesis aims to dissect and examine the key factors influencing the Company’s successes. Included in the dissection is a comparison of the strategies applied by its two managers of the day, Robert Sticht and Russell Murray, and the important roles both played in overcoming considerable adversities to guide the Company through difficult times.

The thesis will demonstrate the Company’s ability to manage diversity across a broad range of activities, fostering an attitude of “we find a way or make it.”<sup>24</sup> In many instances the Company was left to its own devices, with government keeping very much to the background. Ore was mined, copper was produced, huge dividends were paid and a large workforce was maintained. From these activities the government received taxes, rents and fees. Under the Company’s patronage the workers, their families and the region prospered. Aspects of the Company’s activities were of national significance. By the early 1920s the cost of living in the Lyell region was on a par with Melbourne and was generally cheaper than elsewhere in Tasmania. For many years the

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<sup>21</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal, 1920, paper 12, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>23</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

Mount Lyell Company's outputs dominated Tasmania's exports, to the extent it was anecdotally claimed that if Mount Lyell sneezed, then Tasmania got a cold. On the few occasions the Mount Lyell Company met with financial or labour problems, the premiers of the day took an immediate interest in the issues.

The four central themes of the thesis revolve around the industrialisation of the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region of the West Coast and follow in evolutionary order of exploration, isolation, innovation and domination. These themes have been applied to aspects of mining and processing, transport, and occupation. The period chosen, 1859 – 1935, marks the two extremes in the exploration and development of the region studied. Charles Gould, the newly appointed Government Geologist, arrived in Hobart in 1859 at a time when the Island's economy was in dire straits. The staple exports of timber and grain were in decline and wool production was steady. The 1850s was a decade where the cost of imports exceeded the value of exports more often than not.<sup>25</sup> Yet it was the beginning of a period of vision and hope.<sup>26</sup> With great expectation, Charles Gould set out for the first of his three expeditions to the West Coast in December 1859 to explore the rugged and isolated wilderness for valuable minerals.

The period studied ends in 1935, with the remaining shackles of isolation being broken by the opening of the road connection to Queenstown three years earlier and the Mount Lyell Company's successful emergence from the Depression with a record output for copper, gold and silver. The innovative measures introduced to permit large-scale mining of the low-grade ores were highly successful. Employment rose to 1,758 during the year and the Company was again paying handsome dividends. In 1935 the Mount Lyell operations contributed £541,520 towards the total mining output of £1,387,511, which at 39 per cent of total production rendered the Company yet again Tasmania's most significant mineral producer.<sup>27</sup> The Company's contribution to the economy was acknowledged by the Minister for Mines, who reported 'the production of copper is the State's most important branch of mining, and is confined solely to the activities of the Mt. Lyell Company.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 November 1899. This phrase appeared on the copper shield carried by the locomotive on 1 November 1899 to celebrate the opening of the Teepookana to Regatta Point rail extension.

<sup>25</sup> JPPP, *Statistics of Tasmania for 1890, 1891*, paper 150, Statistical Summary relating to Tasmania, 1816-1890, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> WA Townsley, *Tasmania – From Colony to Statehood 1803-1945*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1991, p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> JPPP, *Report of the Secretary for Mines 1935, 1936*, paper 5, pp. 5 & 6.

<sup>28</sup> JPPP, *Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1935*, paper 31, p. 4.



The subject matter of this thesis is best categorised within the area of regional history. In dealing with the exploration and geography, economic development, transport and the urbanisation of the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region of Western Tasmania, it accords with the concepts and guidelines of regional history in Australia, as discussed by H Reynolds,<sup>29</sup> GC Bolton,<sup>30</sup> JW McCarty<sup>31</sup> and J Lavery.<sup>32</sup>

A number of potential problems can arise when writing a regional history of a mining region that spans seventy-six years. Bolton considers that a writer of regional history risks being overwhelmed by large quantities of material, to the extent the work becomes a masterly summary and its latter chapters lack a theme.<sup>33</sup> Given the vast quantity of research material available on the Mount Lyell Company and the region in general, it has been an onerous task to sift through all the information relevant to the major themes. It has also been a source of frustration having to omit interesting material that is of secondary importance within the context of the themes. McCarty offers a partial solution to this problem, advising that studies dealing with longer periods of time should reflect the changing circumstances and boundaries, both physical and conceptual. He encourages historians to 'understand the wider setting in order to "identify" his own region, and impart a wider significance to his regional history.'<sup>34</sup> This stance is reinforced by Bolton who stereotypes Australian regional histories as 'examples of the application of nineteenth-century capitalism to new frontiers.'<sup>35</sup> He invites historians to consider a region's unique history, how it may impact on a wider national scale and how, in turn, national and world events may influence that locality. Lavery observes that regional histories tend to ignore or underplay the role of towns as vital contributors to the economic growth of the region and promotes an intimate connection between regions and urban centres.<sup>36</sup> Chapter 7, 'Civilising the Frontier' gives prominence to the urban developments about the region.

It is agreed by Bolton, McCarty and Lavery that there has been a strong rural bias in many of the regional histories written in Australia, with material concentrating on the second half of the nineteenth century. Bolton observes there are many regions,

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<sup>29</sup> H Reynolds, 'Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA)*, vol 17, no. 1, July 1969, pp. 14-28.

<sup>30</sup> GC Bolton, 'Regional History in Australia', in JA Moses (ed), *Historical Disciplines and Culture in Australia*, St. Lucia, 1979, pp. 215-227.

<sup>31</sup> JW McCarty, 'Australian Regional History', *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, 1978, pp. 88-105.

<sup>32</sup> J Lavery, 'The Study of City and Regional History in Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 41, 1995, pp. 103-138.

<sup>33</sup> Bolton, 'Regional History in Australia', p. 219.

<sup>34</sup> McCarty, 'Australian Regional History', p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Bolton, 'Regional History in Australia', p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> Lavery, 'The Study of City and Regional History in Australia', pp. 121-124.

including much of Tasmania, that still warrant attention.<sup>37</sup> On the Tasmanian theme, Henry Reynolds notes that the island is geographically diverse and 'such diversity has deeply influenced island history and regionalism has long been apparent.'<sup>38</sup> Reynolds contends that during the nineteenth century three frontiers of settlement were discernable – pastoral, small farming and mining. Each frontier contributed significantly towards the evolution of Tasmanian society. He considers mining developments exerted the greatest influence on the pattern of settlement as they opened up 'previously inaccessible and otherwise useless land...stimulated the whole economy, boosting export income, expanding markets and employment opportunities and pouring dividends into pockets of local investors.'<sup>39</sup> In dealing with provincial mining towns and cities, Lavery notes there is an intimate connection between urban centre and region. He cites the case of Broken Hill, observing its history has to be recounted in terms of its 'geographical isolation and its external economic, political and social relationships.'<sup>40</sup>

Not only was the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region isolated, it suffered a negative image arising from the incarceration of the convicts on Sarah Island. Writers described the landforms and events in depressing terms. A century on, embellished accounts of depravity and unforgiving surroundings continued to dominate reports, histories and novels. Richard Flanagan blames anti-transportationists for portraying the area as 'a malevolent and frightening environment...a land of hideous mountains and terrible rivers.'<sup>41</sup> On the landforms, West considered 'every object wore the air of rigour, ferocity, and sadness.'<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein, Marcus Clarke described the terrain as a 'savage jungle.'<sup>43</sup> In 1862 Charles Gould, the Government Geologist, observed the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region to be so remote and isolated that it was 'almost as much *terra incognita* as if it were situated at the south pole.'<sup>44</sup> Local authors continued the theme, Wilberton Tilley entitling his book *The Wild West of Tasmania*<sup>45</sup> and novels of Marie Bjelke Petersen describing the area in the Gordon River precincts as 'a dense

<sup>37</sup> Bolton, 'Regional History in Australia', p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, 'Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania,' p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds, 'Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania,' p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> Lavery, 'The Study of City and Regional History in Australia', p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> R Flanagan, *A Terrible Beauty – History of the Gordon River Country*, Victoria, Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, 1985, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> J West, *The History of Tasmania*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1981 reprint of 1852 publication, p. 396.

<sup>43</sup> M Clarke, *For the Term of his Natural Life*, Melbourne, United Press, undated, p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> House of Assembly Journals (HAJ), Macquarie Harbour – Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, paper 26, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> W Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, Zeehan, Evershed Brothers, 1891.



impenetrable jungle that had swarmed down the savage looking hills.’<sup>46</sup> At the time of the Sticht’s arrival in Queenstown the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* referred to the region as ‘*terra incognita*’, believing it still to be besmirched by the fading days of the convicts, where large areas had never felt the ‘impress of a civilised being’s boot.’<sup>47</sup>

With reference to American regional history, DW Meinig identifies four prime characteristics as relevant to a developing region – ‘population, circulation or transport, culture and political organisation.’<sup>48</sup> McCarty is partially critical of the composition of the characteristics, to the extent that the economic system should be included as an important determinant of the nature of a region.<sup>49</sup> According to McCarty, the grand themes of American history all contain a regional component, whether it is ‘the South versus the North, the rise of the West and the influence of the frontier on American life.’<sup>50</sup> McCarty and Lavery advocate a greater cross-fertilisation of regional and urban history. Lavery observes that, while historians sometimes recognise ‘relationships with the wider economic, social and political context, they seldom effectively fitted regional development into the wider functional state regions of which they were part.’<sup>51</sup> This observation, in part, explains the reasoning behind the title for the thesis, “The Lost Province.” Through the economic expansion of the West Coast region, the Lyell-Macquarie Harbour province severed its economic and social ties with Tasmania, to become effectively a suburb of Melbourne for more than thirty years. The province was not reclaimed by Tasmania until the intervening geographical barrier between east and west was overcome by the opening of the West Coast road.

There have been a number of regional histories written on mining fields about Australia. Because of the early synchronicities between the Broken Hill Proprietary Company’s activities and those at Mount Lyell, I have found two references particularly useful. RJ Solomon’s *The Richest Lode* takes a scholarly approach to the topic of Broken Hill, choosing themes relating to geography, mining, urbanisation, local government, unions, cultural affiliations and regional functions.<sup>52</sup> Complimenting Solomon’s work is B Kennedy’s *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, which provides a social

<sup>46</sup> M Bjelke Petersen, *Dusk*, London, Hutchinson & Co., c. 1921, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1895.

<sup>48</sup> DW Meinig, *Southwest: Three Peoples in Geographical Change 1600-1970*, New York, 1971, and *Imperial Texas*, Austin, 1972, as discussed in McCarty, ‘Australian Regional History’, p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> McCarty, ‘Australian Regional History’, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> McCarty, ‘Australian Regional History’, p. 95.

<sup>51</sup> Lavery, ‘The Study of City and Regional History in Australia’, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger Pty Ltd, 1988, p. 8.

history of the region. His major themes include urbanisation, the evolution of the union town under the domination of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company and Broken Hill as the 'industrial magnet of Australia.'<sup>53</sup> J Kerr provides a fully referenced account of the Mount Morgan gold mine, which is relevant because of its Broken Hill Proprietary connections, its Abt railway and the similarities in its mining history with the Mount Lyell field.<sup>54</sup> M Royle's account of the Perry Shire in Queensland,<sup>55</sup> Blainey's story of the Mount Isa Mines<sup>56</sup> and R Paull's account of Old Walhalla,<sup>57</sup> the Victorian gold mining town, have proved useful in providing comparisons with social activities and lifestyles in mining settlements and the pivotal roles of the mining companies.

A number of publications that deal specifically with Tasmanian West Coast history have provided valuable reference and background material, particularly CJ Binks' well-research work, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*,<sup>58</sup> and its sequel, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*.<sup>59</sup> This detailed work canvasses themes on the prospector, the miner, the traveller and the settler. Of special note is Geoffrey Blainey's *The Peaks of Lyell*, first published in 1954 and republished and updated a number of times since. Blainey provides a powerful and informative account of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company and of events occurring about the West Coast. As admitted by Blainey, the book records the lives and experiences of people he interviewed, it was sponsored by the Company and was edited and checked by various officials, from the chairman down.<sup>60</sup> For this reason there are areas of natural bias. Matters still sensitive to the Company may not be fully covered. From my research it is apparent that aspects concerning the undisclosed profitability of the railway, the treatment of ongoing pollution problems, the North Mount Lyell fire and the Company's selective reporting to government have been understated or not mentioned. Blainey qualifies the presentation of his material, advising that, as the Company's records had not been available for public perusal at the time (1954), the history is written for popular rather than academic tastes.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>53</sup> B Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale – A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1978, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> J Kerr, *Mount Morgan: Gold, Copper and Oil*, St. Lucia, JD and RS Kerr, 1982.

<sup>55</sup> M Royle, *Perry's Past – A Centenary History of Perry Shire*, Mount Perry, Perry Shire Council, 1980.

<sup>56</sup> G Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex – The Story of Mount Isa Mines*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1962.

<sup>57</sup> R Paull, *Old Walhalla – Portrait of a Gold Town*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1963.

<sup>58</sup> CJ Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, Launceston, M & P Brewer, 1980.

<sup>59</sup> CJ Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1988.

<sup>60</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, pp. v and vi.

<sup>61</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 351.

Most of the former Mount Lyell Company's records are now accessible to the general public. The Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT) holds an extensive collection of reports, correspondence, maps and charts, operational details and miscellaneous material that was transferred by the Company prior to its June 1995 closure. From the copious material available it is possible to gain a valuable insight into the management styles and, to a lesser extent, the private thoughts of Robert Sticht and Russell Murray. The AOT collection is complemented by the separate acquisitions of Mount Lyell material it has accumulated over the years. The Company's annual reports, maps and photographic material have been retained on the West Coast and are held by West Coast Heritage Limited at its Zeehan and Queenstown offices. Records and correspondence retained by the Company's former Melbourne office, for the period 1892-1966, were transferred to the University of Melbourne Archives and are available for research purposes. While the Company's records are extensive, it is apparent that some confidential papers have been removed, in particular those relating to the 1912 North Mount Lyell fire. Also disappointing is the lack of material that relates to the Company's railway operations. The closure of the Railway Branch in 1963 saw much of this "collectable" information pilfered from the Queenstown offices over the ensuing years.

A considerable wealth of information appertaining to the West Coast matters is contained within the Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament and the earlier Legislative Council and House of Assembly Journals. These journals include annual statistics and returns for Tasmania, Census summaries, departmental reports, Select Committee investigations, bills and legislative amendments and miscellaneous papers presented before parliament. Other reliable sources of relevant and reliable material include Mines Department generated reports, studies and maps, Lands Department reports and maps and the Tasmanian Government Gazette (previously the Hobart Gazette).

Contemporary local writers Charles Whitham,<sup>62</sup> Mark Ireland,<sup>63</sup> Wilberton Tilley,<sup>64</sup> John Ware<sup>65</sup> and HW Judd's pictorial guide<sup>66</sup> provide valuable snippets of history and a fascinating insight into life on the West Coast around the late 1890s and

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<sup>62</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*.

<sup>63</sup> M Ireland, *Pioneering on North-East Coast and West Coast of Tasmania from 1876 to 1913*, Launceston, undated.

<sup>64</sup> Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*.

<sup>65</sup> J Ware, Strahan: Macquarie Harbour, Strahan, J Ware, 1908.

into the early 1900s. Whitham's is a detailed account on West Coast matters written in 1923. His book, *Western Tasmania – A land of riches and beauty*, has been extremely useful for demographic comparisons between towns and for the geographic detail provided on the western districts. Tilley's book, written in 1891, is narrow in its coverage, dealing with mines, mine managers and mining activities around Zeehan, Dundas and Mount Lyell. Ireland gives an account of his early activities on the mining fields. Written c. 1913, several decades after his exploits, the book lacks accurate detail and is used with caution. Both Ware and Judd provide a broad cross-section of valuable photographs and some useful demographic information, Judd on the greater West Coast, Ware on the Strahan area only.

Numerous books and articles have been published on West Coast matters, but few are authoritative and many do not include original research or worthwhile references. Kerry Pink's *West Coast Story*<sup>67</sup> provides a generalised history of the West Coast mining fields but lacks depth and references. Local histories of West Coast towns and mines to which I have referred include M Godfrey's writings on Waratah,<sup>68</sup> J Thorne's outline of Tullah and its tramway,<sup>69</sup> G Jay's coverage of one hundred years of Rosebery,<sup>70</sup> K Pink and P Crawford's account of the Renison Bell field,<sup>71</sup> K Pink's brief history of Strahan<sup>72</sup> and E Wedd's memories of Linda.<sup>73</sup> Of particular use to historians studying the West Coast is T Jetson's and R Ely's guide to printed sources on the West and South-West of Tasmania.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, this compilation of authors and their works is deficient in that it omits a number of works relevant to this region. In more recent years there have been a proliferation of archaeological, environmental, heritage and other specialist studies on West Coast topics. Some of these reports are well researched and fully referenced and have proven most useful, while others fall into the unreliable category due to the frequent uncritical recounting of anecdotal and unsubstantiated material. Two more recent histories written by Haygarth<sup>75</sup> and

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<sup>66</sup> HW Judd, *Pictorial Guide to the West Coast of Tasmania*, Zeehan, Western Tasmanian Tourists' Association, 1908.

<sup>67</sup> K Pink, *The West Coast Story – A History of Western Tasmania and its mining fields*, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, 1984.

<sup>68</sup> M Godfrey, *Waratah – Pioneer of the West*, Waratah, Municipality of Waratah, 1984.

<sup>69</sup> J Thorne, *Whistle at the Bridge*, Hobart, Cat & Fiddle Press, 1980.

<sup>70</sup> WG Jay, *In the Shadow of Murchison - Rosebery 1893-1993*, Smithton, WG Jay, 1993.

<sup>71</sup> K Pink & P Crawford, *Renison - The Slumbering Giant*, Zeehan, Renison Ltd, 1996.

<sup>72</sup> K Pink, *Through Hells Gates – A History of Strahan and Macquarie Harbour*, Burnie, Advocate Newspaper Pty Ltd, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> EJ Wedd, *Linda – Ghost Town of Mt. Lyell*, Queenstown, EJ Wedd, 1987.

<sup>74</sup> T Jetson & R Ely, *History of West and South-West Tasmania: A Guide to Printed Sources*, Hobart, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 1995.

<sup>75</sup> N Haygarth, 'The Father of Tasmania?: Measuring the Legend of James "Philosopher" Smith,' Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2003.

Roberts<sup>76</sup> provide valuable material on West Coast mining topics, Haygarth dealing with James 'Philosopher' Smith of Waratah fame and Roberts with the government's role in administering mining development in Tasmania. Neither work provides a detailed insight into regional history within the mining regions.

Day to day events on the West Coast were covered by the locally produced newspapers. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (14 October 1890 – 31 May 1922), the *Mount Lyell Standard* (28 November 1896 – 22 December 1902) and the *Strahan Banner* (5 May 1900 – 2 March 1901) provide a particularly valuable insight into living conditions on the Lyell mining field. For most of its life the *Mount Lyell Standard* adopted a hostile stance towards the Mount Lyell Company, aspects of which are covered in Chapter 2. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* enjoyed the general support of the Company but eventually folded in May 1922 following the decline of Zeehan and its silver mines. Russell Murray, the Acting General Manager of Mount Lyell, sentimentally advocated assisting the paper during its final years but upon its closure he advised against providing finance to restart the aged press to compete against the up-to-date printing plant of the Burnie based *Advocate*.<sup>77</sup>

The *Mercury* (Hobart), *Examiner* (Launceston) and *Advocate* also reported West Coast events, sometimes with a strong parochial bias, such was the importance of the Lyell field to the regional business interests in Tasmania. Records researched in the United Kingdom during a 1991 Churchill Fellowship study include annual reports for English companies with West Coast affiliations (Guildhall Library – London), papers and reports on West Coast mining fields (The British Library – London), North Mount Lyell Company records (Leeds Industrial Museum), Mount Lyell Company railway records (Mitchell Library Glasgow) and the Mining Journal Ltd offices in London. The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds fragments of Mount Lyell material, including the E Carus Driffield photographic collection, copies of which were obtained during a research visit.

This thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter outlines the early challenges faced by visitors to the isolated Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region during the period 1859 to 1892, as they attempted to explore, mine and settle the rugged wilderness. Exploration was extremely difficult because of the sheer remoteness of the region and the harsh extremities of the environment. Significant problems are identified

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<sup>76</sup> G Roberts, 'The Tasmanian Government and Metal Mining Industry – An Administrative History: 1880-1914,' Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 12 June 1922, Confidential Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/34, pp. 21-22, AOT.

that drew considerable risk and high cost. Governments and companies baulked at outlaying the amounts involved. Stumbling blocks that prevented development included the identification of appropriate ore-treatment processes and the resolving of sea and land transport issues. Further difficulties were encountered in selecting a suitable port-site, establishing communities in the trying conditions and in providing infrastructure and social amenities for those willing to live and work in the region. Questions arose as to whether it was appropriate to rely on conventional methods to overcome the major problems or whether the circumstances required radical and innovative solutions. This chapter identifies the major questions needing resolution before development and urbanisation proceeded.

Chapter 2 considers the mining and processing issues confronting the principals of the newly established Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company. It outlines the advancements made through the introduction of innovative technologies, to the extent Robert Sticht's refinement of the pyritic smelting process was recognised at an international level. The contrasting management styles of the Company's two general managers are examined. Technically brilliant and a shrewd tactician, Sticht established and expanded activities at Mount Lyell, helping the Company to dominate the mining field. Questions were raised as to his ability to maintain the Company's supremacy following a series of strikes, a major mine calamity and worsening international conditions. Sticht was equal to the occasion, supported by Russell Murray, his capable Mining Engineer. A practical man, and well respected by the tough mining community, Murray eventually assumed control of the Company at a time of falling copper prices and mine closures throughout Australia. His ability to handle the worsening situation was questioned. Murray responded by radically reshaping the Company's activities through the implementation of innovative mining and processing techniques. His methods are analysed. By 1935 the Company was again competitive on a world scale, paying significant dividends to its shareholders. The attainment of Company profits came at the cost of massive pollution about the countryside. The approaches adopted by the two managers on this issue are examined.

Chapters 3 outlines the difficulties faced by the various isolated communities within the region and their reliance on efficient and safe forms of transport. Early shipping to the West Coast was neither safe nor cost effective. The West Coast population suffered ongoing frustration as successive governments procrastinated over the implementation of Napier Bell's innovative harbour improvement scheme. The reasons for the delay are identified as are the innovative works that were eventually

implemented to overcome the eight feet six inches depth over the sandbar guarding the seaward entrance to the harbour. The chapter outlines the attempts made by the cash-strapped Strahan Marine Board to advance harbour activities, which saw it resort to conventional dredging methods on the inner harbour shoals. Eventually the issues were resolved by the further partial implementation of Bell's original innovative strategies. During the long-winded process the harbour lost freight to the railways feeding the port of Burnie. The chapter identifies the port operations about the harbour and examines the process by which the Mount Lyell Company rose to dominate port, harbour and marine transport in the region.

Chapter 4 covers the development of tracks and roads throughout the region. Unlike the other forms of transport discussed, neither tracks nor roads could be readily adapted to meet the difficult geographic conditions. The retarding elements preventing the advancement of tracks and roads are identified as are the reasons for opposing the introduction of motor vehicles into the region. The chapter critically examines the government's attempts through the first decade of the twentieth-century to construct a network of exploration tracks as a means of opening up broad areas of country to mineral exploration. Tracks and roads were employed for short-haul communication and cartage purposes about the region, the major routes being identified and described. It was not until the early 1920s, by which time motor vehicle and road construction techniques had both improved markedly, that this innovative form of transport was vigorously sought on the West Coast. The struggle to open up communication with the "outside world" is outlined, and culminates in the 1932 opening of the road between Queenstown and Hobart. This event is recognised for effectively ending the issue of isolation for the people of the Lyell area and re-uniting the lost province with the rest of Tasmania.

Chapter 5 deals with railway and tramway transport, the success of which was an absolute priority for the Mount Lyell Company. The physical and political difficulties in locating the route, selecting the rail system and the employment of construction methods are examined. The innovative Abt System, the first of its kind in Australasia, and its specially designed locomotives proved a resounding success, as did the radical bridge construction techniques used to overcome the difficult terrain. Challenges mounted by rival consortia, one friendly to the Company's cause, are detailed as are the reasons for the failures of these ventures. The Abt railway proved to be the civilising factor. It was reliable and extremely profitable, to the extent the returns embarrassed the Company. Considerable precautions were taken to hide the figures from public

scrutiny. The amount of the profits and the reasons for the subterfuge are detailed, as are the successful operations that provided the early backbone to the Company's rise to dominance. Other innovative forms of tramways and underground electrical systems were utilised about the region. These are briefly identified, as are the roles of the railways and tramways in providing access to the isolated towns and camps.

Chapter 6 outlines the considerable hardships faced by the early inhabitants of the isolated areas within the region and the methods by which the population coped and adapted in order to survive. The Mount Lyell Company was extremely innovative in harnessing the plentiful supplies of water, details of which and the methods used are outlined. Occupation within the region was extremely challenging, yet the people proved resilient and resourceful. The development of sporting, recreational and community events are documented and their value to the well-being of the community discussed. The Company pioneered health and social welfare schemes to placate its workforce, suppress union agitation and to lift living standards. Its innovative methods of achieving workplace harmony, to the extent the practices were acknowledged at a state and national level, are discussed in detail.

Chapter 7 examines the urbanisation of the region through the grouping of the settlements into common themes. The basis for the establishment and ongoing purpose of each of the towns is discussed, as are the major influences controlling their destinies. Brief demographic details are provided for the major settlements about the area. Comparisons are made with other mining towns about the greater West Coast region. Despite an early intention to avoid direct intervention in social and civic activities, the Company became inextricably involved, to the extent it dominated the destinies of nearly every settlement and camp about the region. The motives behind the Company's change of policy are discussed as are the methods by which it came to dominate the urban environment.

The conclusion discusses the key factors in the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's ability to cope with isolation, introduce innovative practices and its rise to a position of dominance, enabling it to shape the history of the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region.



## CHAPTER 1: TERRA INCOGNITA – AN ERA OF CHALLENGES 1859 – 1892

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the challenges faced by explorers, prospectors, miners and settlers as they sought to discover, open up and occupy the area on Tasmania's rugged West Coast that would eventually become known as the Lyell region. For the purpose of this thesis, the West Coast seaboard encompasses the coastline extending southwards from Cape Grim, on Tasmania's far north-west, to South East Cape in the far south-east. Survival in the harsh environment was extremely difficult. The problems caused by isolation, inefficient mining practices and government procrastination are discussed, as are the methods employed to overcome them. Some would prove successful, others would fail through a lack of knowledge and understanding of the prevailing conditions. Transport was a most important issue that needed to be resolved. The latter part of the chapter examines the various forms of transport, the failures, the limited successes and the delays and frustrations endured by the region's inhabitants.

From its first sightings by European sailors, the West Coast presented a foreboding appearance. Comprising windswept cliff-fronts, rocky coastlines and long sandy beaches, its shores were frequently lashed by strong westerly gales and pounded by the giant waves from the Southern Ocean. It was feared by mariners as 'a merciless destroyer of ships and men.'<sup>1</sup> Located mid-coast, overshadowing the battered shoreline, was the West Coast Mountain Range. It presented as a barrier of rocky sentinels dominating the surrounding countryside. In the land between the sea and steep foothills, amid the deep valleys and tangled vegetation, were buried vast deposits of minerals waiting to be discovered. Dutch explorer Abel Janszoon Tasman first detected evidence of these ore-bodies. On 22 November 1642, while out of sight of land, he observed an unsteadiness in the ship's compass. The variance in the readings he supposed to be caused by mines of loadstone nearby.<sup>2</sup>

The first interest in mining within the region was shown by Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell, who in June 1818 considered the possibility of recovering coal and Huon pine from about Macquarie Harbour.<sup>3</sup> Sorell was fully cognisant of the isolated nature of the area and the difficult shipping conditions that prevailed about the coastline. He was also aware of the limitations placed on the sizes of boats entering over the

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<sup>1</sup> G Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's West Coast*, ACT, Navarine Publishing, 1993, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> JE Heeres, *Discovery of Tasmania - Extracts from the Journal of Abel Janszoon Tasman*, Hobart, Government Printer, 1985, p.26.



MAP 2 - STRAHAN AND MACQUARIE HEADS AREA





### MAP 3 – QUEENSTOWN AND KING RIVER AREA





sandbar into Macquarie Harbour, as he directed Thomas Florence to ‘make a Survey of the Harbour and its entrance.’<sup>4</sup> During the subsequent penal occupation of Sarah Island, in the years 1822 to 1833, the rigors of the West Coast climate and terrain were fully experienced by Europeans.

Walled in by a barrier of dense rainforest, numerous valleys, fast flowing rivers and rugged mountain ranges, escape overland from Macquarie Harbour was limited to all but a few very hardy individuals. Despite the hostile surroundings and the challenging climate the population survived. Amid the embellished horrors of the convict era were instances of innovative practices and evidence of the population adapting to the harsh conditions. Crops were grown, valuable timber was recovered, many boats were built, limestone and coal were mined from about the harbour and Gordon River. A semaphore communication system was developed in 1822. Flag signals were employed to notify the incoming boats of conditions over the bar at the entrance to Macquarie Harbour from the signal pole located at the nearby pilot’s station. Messages were also relayed between the pilot station and Sarah Island, a distance of twenty-one miles.<sup>5</sup>

Upon the abandonment of the convict settlement in 1834, the region was virtually deserted for nearly fifty years, apart from visits by Huon piners to Macquarie Harbour and an occasional overland trek. Early explorers included William Sharland in 1832,<sup>6</sup> James Calder in 1840,<sup>7</sup> and Sir John and Lady Franklin in 1842.<sup>8</sup> The nature of the visits to the western wilderness was to change in the early 1850’s, following the onset of “gold fever.” Gold had been discovered by Edward Hargraves at Bathurst in February 1851 and later that same year in various locations about country Victoria. As a consequence, Van Diemen’s Land<sup>9</sup> suffered a mass migration of working men to these fields. For those remaining at home, the initial excitement created by the gold rushes quickly wore off. Anticipation changed to resentment. The transformation of Victoria

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<sup>3</sup> Sorell to Governor Macquarie, 20 June 1818, *Historical Records of Australia (HRA)*, series 3, vol. 2, p. 334.

<sup>4</sup> Sorell to Governor Macquarie, 18 November 1818, *HRA*, series 3, vol. 2, p. 363.

<sup>5</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot Station Conservation Plan*, Hobart, Department of Environment and Land Management, 1995, pp. 6-8.

<sup>6</sup> Legislative Council Journals (LCJ), Survey Office Reports. Rough notes of a Journal of Expedition to the Westward in 1832, 1861, paper 16, pp. 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> *Mercury*, 21 January 1860.

<sup>8</sup> CJ Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, Launceston, M & P Brewer, 1980, pp. 155-156.

<sup>9</sup> The name Van Diemen’s Land was formally changed to Tasmania on 17 December 1855.

into a flourishing and populous land was looked upon with jealousy by many within the island colony.<sup>10</sup>

In June 1851 Reverend William Branwhite Clarke gave rise to considerable speculation in Van Diemen's Land when he wrote to Governor Sir William Denison predicting that gold would be discovered in the area to the west of Lake St Clair, towards Frenchman's Cap.<sup>11</sup> Clarke was born in Suffolk, England, on 2 June 1798. He had been ordained as a priest in 1823 prior to undertaking geological studies. He emigrated to New South Wales in 1839 as a teacher, but it was in the field of geology that he gained fame. He worked as the government's scientific adviser and as a geological surveyor in New South Wales. He was well respected and was well acquainted with all aspects of the gold phenomenon in that colony.<sup>12</sup> While Clarke's letter led to a concentration of attention around Frenchman's Cap, the first significant finds of gold were on the eastern side of the Island, on 18 February 1852, near Fingal. The field attracted around 200 prospectors, but lost its impetus after the initial gold stocks had been worked out.<sup>13</sup>

The discoveries at Fingal failed to evoke the desired goldrush for the colony. They served as a momentary distraction from the many failed West Coast ventures. As the mainland goldfields continued to prosper, rewards were offered to promote prospecting activity. Early in the summer of 1853-54, joint Hobart and Launceston Gold Committees met and decided to offer a reward of £15,000,<sup>14</sup> if gold was discovered prior to 30 June 1854. Shortly after the reward was announced, Clarke again repeated his predictions, this time extending the area to be prospected to include the land between Western Bluff and Port Dalrymple.<sup>15</sup> The promise of the substantial reward sparked immediate interest and seven exploration parties were mounted during January 1854. One was to Frenchman's Cap, via Marlborough, another to Macquarie Harbour by sea.<sup>16</sup> The expeditions again proved fruitless. The reward went unclaimed. On 4 December 1854, in what was to be a major venture, thirty-nine men sailed from Hobart aboard the *Gem*, bound for Macquarie Harbour. Parties examined areas around

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<sup>10</sup> R. Flanagan, *A Terrible Beauty – History of the Gordon River Country*, Victoria, Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, 1985, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> *Examiner*, 1 December 1853.

<sup>12</sup> A Mozley, 'William Branwhite Clarke (1798-1879)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Volume 3, pp. 420-422.

<sup>13</sup> G Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, Hobart, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> According to Roberts the amount was raised by public subscription, mainly in £100 contributions.

<sup>15</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 1 December 1853, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 19 January 1854, p. 2.

the harbour shores, up the Franklin River to Frenchman's Cap and along the banks of the Gordon River without success.<sup>17</sup>

Private enterprise's attempts to kick-start a gold rush had failed. Much money and time had been wasted on what amounted to be a series of indiscriminate and ill-equipped reconnaissances into the western district. Towards the end of 1857 the government assumed the responsibility of compiling reliable information from which accurate assessments and predictions would be provided to assist with the discovery of minerals fields. The House of Assembly resolved to direct £5,000 to underwrite the costs of preparing a geological map and book covering the mines and geology of Tasmania.<sup>18</sup>

William Alcock Tully, an Irishman, who had arrived in Hobart in August 1852 to work as a religious instructor, was appointed to lead the fact-finding team.<sup>19</sup> He was also an experienced surveyor, prospector and bushman, and had successfully climbed Frenchman's Cap two years earlier.<sup>20</sup> The well-provisioned party of eleven left Hamilton on 12 January 1859 for Mount Arrowsmith. Upon arrival, Tully established a base camp on the western slopes of the mountain and carried out some initial prospecting works. The party then split into four groups, which enabled the broad exploration of the country along the Franklin River, in the Loddon Valley and around Frenchman's Cap. Before departing Hobart, Tully had resolved to visit the Eldon Range as this district met the criteria in Clarke's 'authoritative assumption of the existence of gold at any dividing range near the intersection of longitude 146 with the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel of south latitude.'<sup>21</sup>

Tully's expedition proved fruitless, with little or no gold discovered after nine weeks in the field. This poor result cast considerable doubt on the value of Clarke's prophecies. It was at this stage that the government broadened its horizons in the search of someone to undertake the geological survey of the Island. Clarke had previously declined to accept the position in March 1858, citing health reasons as his excuse. Eventually, upon the recommendation of Sir Roderick Murchison, Director of the Great Britain Geological Survey, Charles Gould was approached to fill the position.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> LJ Duffy, 'William Alcock Tully (1830-1905)', *ADB*, vol. 6, p. 309.

<sup>20</sup> Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>21</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 May 1859, p. 741.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 42.

## Exploration – The Journeys of Charles Gould

The following sections examine geologist Charles Gould's forays into the region and the eventual mineral discoveries and mining development about the area up until 1892. Charles Gould was born on 4 June 1834 in England. He proved a capable scholar, graduating in 1853 at the University of London. The following year he won the Duke of Cornwall's exhibition at the Royal School of Mines. At the time of Gould's appointment to the position of Tasmanian Government Geologist, his practical experience appears to have been limited to working on the Geological Survey of Great Britain.<sup>23</sup> Disembarking in Victoria in June 1859, Gould took the opportunity to visit the local goldfields to gain valuable knowledge of the mining operations and conditions. Robson considers that 'as it was generally accepted that discovery of gold in Victoria led to immigration and prosperity, the island colonists of Tasmania also determined to find the precious metal.'<sup>24</sup>

Gould's pending arrival in Tasmania had been eagerly anticipated by those anxious to locate payable gold. He would be given little time to acclimatise to the local environment. Within a few weeks of his August 1859 arrival in Hobart, Gould had completed a preliminary report on the Fingal goldfield. On 17 November a pressure group of influential bankers and businessmen waited on the Governor and Executive Council, seeking the formation of a party to explore the West Coast. Gould was assigned to the task. The high public expectation weighed heavily on his mind. He wisely informed the government that he would not make any wild predictions on the likely success of his venture for he knew of no geological information which would allow him 'to offer an opinion on the chances of finding the precious metal.'<sup>25</sup>

Gould and party departed Hobart Town on 17 December 1859 and travelled via Lake St Clair to Coal Hill, where a base camp was established. From here, Gould continued on to the Collingwood River Valley where he located remnants from Tully's trip made the previous summer. Gould's exploration works about the area proved unsuccessful. He then continued on towards the junction of the Eldon and King's Rivers. Despite promising geological signs, all test holes in the area failed to show anything of note except abundant amounts of pyrites.<sup>26</sup> Gould and his assistant, Gordon Burgess, then detoured north towards Mount Murchison. Along the way they

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<sup>23</sup> MR Banks & ML Yaxley, 'Charles Gould (1834-1893)', *ADB*, vol. 4, pp. 277-278.

<sup>24</sup> L Robson, *A History of Tasmania – Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 44.



unsuccessfully explored land to the east of Mount Farrell and as far north as the Middlesex Plains for gold. While Gould's expedition would not have been judged a success as far as mineral discoveries were concerned, his mapping of the hitherto unexplored regions provided a valuable reference. Short of time, Gould eventually called a halt to exploration work after reaching the banks of the King's River, near the foothills of Mount Lyell. On describing the intervening land between Mount Lyell and the western coastline, he predicted the locating of an easy route to the water. This assumption would prove to be incorrect, much to Gould's chagrin on his following expedition:

The area examined by the late Expedition is limited upon the east and west by mountain ranges; the one consisting of the broken and rugged summits of those at the edge of the plateau of trap rock which supports the Lake District upon the east, while the other is a continuation of the range extending northward from Mount Sorell: both are wild and rugged, the former particularly so, the latter being interrupted by several passes or valleys which permit of an easy passage across it to the coast.<sup>27</sup>

Understandably, the public was genuinely disappointed by Gould's failure to locate gold. Interest in the western region waned considerably, the government temporarily abandoning its sponsorship of further expensive expeditions over the following season.<sup>28</sup> With little activity on the home-front, the fragile Tasmanian economy continued to struggle. Further pressure mounted in May 1861 when a Tasmanian, Thomas Gabriel Read, discovered gold in Otago, New Zealand. Read's discovery sparked another migration of men from Tasmania. Over the following three years (1861-63) emigration numbers again exceeded the number of immigrants, as was the case at the height of the mainland gold rushes.<sup>29</sup> Signs of resentment against Gould were expressed in the newspapers. One correspondent observed that 'a geologist should not only be ornamental but useful...if our geologist is ambitious to perpetuate his name he cannot better achieve his object than by opening up gold and coal fields to the capital and industry of the island.'<sup>30</sup>

Galvanised by the flagging fortunes caused by the New Zealand gold discoveries, the government commissioned Gould to undertake a second expedition to the West Coast, scheduled for the 1861/62 summer. It also introduced the *Gold Reward Bill* into

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<sup>26</sup> House of Assembly Journals (HAJ), Exploration of the Western Country – Mr Gould's Report, 1860, paper 4, pp. 1-7.

<sup>27</sup> HAJ, Exploration of the Western Country – Mr Gould's Report, 1860, paper 4, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, p. 179.

<sup>29</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Statistics of Tasmania for 1890, 1891, paper 150, statistical summary p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 8 December 1861, p. 4.

Parliament on 24 January 1862 to stimulate private exploration. The proroguing of Parliament prevented the Bill being considered by the Legislative Council. It also removed the opportunity to claim a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of a profitable gold field in Tasmania.<sup>31</sup>

Gould's second visit to the western district would confirm the "frontier status" of the West Coast, highlighting its isolation and epitomising the difficulties and frustrations encountered by previous explorers visiting the region. He departed Hobart in early February 1862, the sojourn expected to take four months. Again Gould travelled via the cart track to Lake St Clair and then on to the upper reaches of the King's River. To avoid carrying the party's bulky provisions over the arduous track, Gould had sent four months of provisions aboard the *Flying Cloud*, which sailed just prior to Gould commencing his overland trek. The rendezvous for the parties was to be at the supply depot, located at the mouth of the King's River, in Macquarie Harbour. Wisely, Gould had taken extra provisions in the chance that the *Flying Cloud* was delayed.<sup>32</sup>

The foreshadowed easy passage between the King's River and the coast did not eventuate. Peering from the saddle extending between Mounts Lyell and Owen,<sup>33</sup> over the Queen River Valley and towards Macquarie Harbour, Gould commented:

I reached the saddle, and got a view of the country towards the coast. I was much disappointed by its appearance, for with the exception of a small plain, distant about two miles on the other side of a set of frightful ravines or gulleys (sic), there was no open land visible.<sup>34</sup>

The ensuing scramble down into the Queen River Valley and back up the hill face on western side took the party four days to complete. After reaching the small plain, the progress did not become any easier. Gould recounted:

As far as the eye could reach it appeared to be a gently sloping plain covered with nothing but a tangled mass of Bauera, Cutting grass and threadvines matted together so as to be almost impenetrable, intermixed with a small-leaved species of fern, and prickly mimosa, while the whole was sustained by saplings of honey-suckle, dogwood, and tea-tree, and crossed by dead logs, limbs, and spars, heaped together in endless confusion; the ground beneath, when we reached it (which was often not for many yards together a noxious swamp), through such a country our progress was most laborious, in wet weather almost impossible.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> HAJ, Votes and Proceedings, Friday 24 January 1862, Discussions on Bill 61, p. 420.

<sup>32</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

<sup>33</sup> This ridge later became officially known as Karlson's Gap although locals refer to it as the "Gormanston Gap."

<sup>34</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

<sup>35</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.



Apart from the difficult terrain and dense vegetation, the weather was far from pleasant. Gould lamented that he was “drenched to the skin, every day, and all day.” Once a member of his party had to wait ten days for the floodwaters of the King’s River to subside before he could cross it, while Gould himself nearly drowned when he fell into a river with his knapsack on. In what proved to be a journey of epic proportions, the party departed the Mount Lyell base camp on 28 February 1862 and did not reach the shores of Macquarie Harbour until 24 March. The virtually straight line route of fifteen miles took twenty-five days to complete.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Gould had contemplated arriving before the boat, it was his delayed arrival in Macquarie Harbour that caused concern for those aboard the *Flying Cloud*, which had long moored at the mouth of the King’s River. When Gould finally reached the shores of the harbour he sighted in the distance the pining boat, *Swansea Packet*, preparing to sail for Hobart Town. He attempted to make contact by the use of signal fires but his efforts went unnoticed in the misty conditions. Captain Lloyd, skipper of the *Swansea Packet*, through his conversations with Mr Bennett, master of the *Flying Cloud*, had sailed for Hobart Town with news of the missing party. Upon his arrival, reports of Gould’s disappearance quickly circulated about Hobart Town. Land and sea search parties were immediately dispatched, albeit for what was to prove a needless cause.<sup>37</sup>

Though Gould had been unable to prevent the misleading news reaching Hobart Town, he did manage eventually to attract the attention of those at the King’s River depot. A small boat was duly despatched to retrieve Gould and party and bring them to the safety of the camp. The problems of poor communication, isolation and a lack of local knowledge greatly perturbed Gould. It caused him to later comment that the region ‘is at present almost as much *terra incognita* as if it were situated at the south pole.’<sup>38</sup> Gould’s concerns over the lack of accurate maps were well founded. Many had been compiled from mountain top sketches, that involved much guesswork where intervening mountain ranges hid the distant hills and valleys and masked the directional changes of the rivers and creeks. In many cases the plans perpetuated previous mistakes. Gould, although well equipped in mapping skills, was also guilty of these same failings. His 1862 map of the Lyell Region incorrectly noted the path of the King’s River, mistakenly identified the Henty River as the Queen River, and lacked

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<sup>36</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

<sup>37</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

<sup>38</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour - Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, paper 26, p. 4.

accuracy about the Mount Sorell region.<sup>39</sup> However, he rectified some errors on his third trip, having gained a familiarity with the landscape.<sup>40</sup>

Gould's maps and observations of the Mount Lyell area form an important record as they provide a valuable first hand record of the Lyell region prior to the intervention of the white man and the subsequent scarring of the landscape by the mining activities. Gould was also guilty of leaving his physical mark on the countryside. He adopted the age-old practice of track cutters by burning a path ahead. This he did on entering the Chamouni Valley, where he 'fired it all the way', and then repeated the exercise on the western plateau above the Henty River.<sup>41</sup> While in the locality, Gould named many of the prominent geographical features in the area. The naming of the mountains had been very topical at the time for Gould. It was in 1859, the same year that Gould set sail from England, that Charles Darwin published his work on evolution, *The Origin of Species*. Appearing to favour the anti-evolutionary stance, Gould named the three prominent peaks of Sedgwick, Owen and Jukes in honour of Darwin's opponents. The smaller peaks of Lyell, Huxley and Darwin were named after supporters. Blainey claims the pro-evolutionary faction gained their revenge when Australia's richest copper area became known as the Mount Lyell Field.<sup>42</sup>

Gould was well aware that the success of his expeditions would be judged by his ability to locate payable gold. Seeking to lessen the impact of a relatively fruitless second trip, on 7 May 1862 he penned a letter from the King's River depot to the Surveyor-General. He advised that small quantities of auriferous rocks had been found. He considered there were indications that a gold field existed between the junction of the Franklin and the west-bend of the Gordon River, and the Frenchman's Cap. Although this was not generally considered important at the time, Gould had found lead and traces of copper and he 'was anxious to examine the King's River, as high up as possible.'<sup>43</sup>

Released to the newspapers, Gould's letter temporarily raised the hopes of the public. The *Mercury* called for immediate government action to 'prevent the selection of auriferous lands by private speculators.'<sup>44</sup> However, it was a more circumspect

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<sup>39</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour - Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, Sketch Map attachment to paper 26.

<sup>40</sup> LCJ, Western Country - Report of the Government Geologist, 1863, paper 1A, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862. It should be noted that Gould had mistaken the Henty River for the Queen River and this reference appertains to Howard's Plains, located on the western side of the Queen River.

<sup>42</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, pp. 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury*, 14 May 1862.

Gould that filed his official report. He noted small finds of alluvial gold in the westerly flowing Franklin and King Rivers, but questioned whether men would have sufficient energy, determination and patience to prospect within country that presented such extraordinary difficulties. In a further admission of defeat, Gould summed up his trip by writing that “the gold-field has yet to be discovered; there are strong probabilities of its existence, and its locality can be approximately defined by broad limits, but its richness remain yet to be determined.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite his lack of success in finding gold, Gould remained committed to undertaking a geological survey of the Island. Without it, ‘vague supposition must always supercede authentic information, and the development of what might possibly prove to be the most valuable portion of the Island, be left to the chance discoveries of casual investigation in place of the more certain experience of well-directed research.’<sup>46</sup> Gould’s prophetic advice went unheeded. He was, however, directed by government to revisit the West Coast, to verify the reports of the drift gold his parties had previously discovered in the Franklin and King’s Rivers. Not relishing the challenge, Gould wrote to the Chief Secretary on 23 October 1862 advising the task was more befitting of a man with mining experience and not a geological surveyor as was his expertise.<sup>47</sup> His protestations fell on deaf ears. The expedition proceeded with Gould in charge. This time his party of thirty-one included qualified miners and diggers, bushmen and messengers. The majority sailed aboard the boats *Ann* and *Blanche*, that departed Hobart on 20 and 22 November 1862 respectively. Gould once again travelled overland ‘with a view to re-examine a portion of the country passed over last season.’<sup>48</sup>

Gould’s third and final expedition to the West Coast was to be his most protracted, spanning late November through to early June 1863. He concentrated his initial efforts along the Franklin River and about the precincts of Frenchman’s Cap. Another group followed Calder’s 1840-41 track, from the Franklin River back towards Mount Arrowsmith. Other parties investigated the tributaries of the Gordon River and at various points around Macquarie Harbour. These concerted efforts did not locate payable quantities of gold. Regrouping the various parties, Gould selected nine of the most experienced miners to accompany him on an exploration of the King River. The remaining members of the team returned to Hobart on 18 April aboard the schooner

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<sup>45</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour - Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, paper 26, pp. 6-8.

<sup>46</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour - Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, paper 26, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> LCJ, Western Country - Report of the Government Geologist, 1863, paper 1A, p. 3.

*Anne*.<sup>49</sup> Learning from his previous experiences, Gould penned a series of letters prior to his return from the West Coast that were published in the *Mercury* and the *Examiner*. With only the King's River still to explore, Gould advised readers that he had found gold 'almost everywhere, but not in sufficient quantity to prove paying.'<sup>50</sup>

The exploration of the King River was limited to some five to six weeks, due to diminishing supplies and poor weather. Although Gould considered the character of the local slates to be promising, with some coarser grains of gold being discovered, his 16 June 1863 report to Parliament effectively doused all interest in the West Coast by stating:

The whole of the country tested by the Expedition does not contain gold in sufficient quantities to form a paying Gold-field; the only possible exception is in the case of the country about the King's River, where, as I have before stated, slates of a more promising appearance exist, although, however, they only occupy an inconsiderable area.<sup>51</sup>

After three trips to the Macquarie Harbour area, no one was much the wiser. Gould's expeditions had neither confirmed the existence of significant deposits of gold nor had they ruled out the likelihood of its discovery. Gould fully realised he may become the scapegoat in the exercise. He had not delivered the pot of gold that would resolve the economic ills threatening the colony. In December 1863 Gould admitted to William Clarke 'geologically speaking the results of my last year are absolutely nil.'<sup>52</sup> His frustrations were understandable. He firmly believed that he had been originally employed to undertake a geological survey of the Island, his true area of expertise. The job of prospecting for gold was not his forte, the task being better left to the expert miners. Whether Clarke was totally sympathetic to Gould's cause is debatable. Gould's lack of gold discoveries within the region had also greatly reduced Clarke's credibility in being able to predict the location of gold. Some years later the *Mercury* accused Gould of being a featherbed explorer.<sup>53</sup>

In reviewing Gould's journeys to the Mount Lyell region, some historians rightly express reservations as to Gould's ability as a geologist. Blainey asks why Gould failed to find gold in the vicinity of Mount Lyell given that 'for several weeks his miners camped and walked in a valley where most creeks yielded gold in years to come?'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> LCJ, Western Country - Report of the Government Geologist, 1863, paper 1A, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Examiner*, 21 April 1863.

<sup>51</sup> LCJ, Western Country - Report of the Government Geologist, 1863, paper 1A, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 - 1883*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> *Mercury*, 5 July 1866.

<sup>54</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 10.

Binks offers the excuse that the men accompanying Gould overland to Mount Lyell were bushmen, while the experienced diggers had sailed direct to Macquarie Harbour.<sup>55</sup> In the final phase of his third trip Gould journeyed up the King River. It is unlikely that he ventured into the King River Gorge where the river 'cuts a mighty chasm between Jukes and Huxley.'<sup>56</sup> Had he continued on he may have discovered evidence of gold near the confluence of the King's and Queen River, the later site of the Harris' Reward gold mine. A detour up the Queen River Valley would have also led to the goldfields of Lynchford, Howard's Plains and Mount Lyell. Gould's June 1863 report does mention coarser grains of gold being found in the King's River but it was likely to have been in the lower reaches or in nearby creeks. Had he ventured as far as the gorge between Mounts Huxley and Jukes, he would have also realised his previous mapping error that had placed the King's River passing to the north of Mount Sorell.<sup>57</sup>

Not only did Gould fail to find gold in the Mount Lyell district, he also made no reference to observing evidence of copper in the very area that thirty years later would be proven to contain extensive copper ore bodies.<sup>58</sup> Strangely, Gould's parties did obtain traces of copper about four miles up the Franklin River,<sup>59</sup> an area that had warranted little more than casual investigation over the years. Binks considers Gould to have been a good bushman, an effective leader who showed compassion for his men. He opened up hundreds of kilometres of tracks into the most inaccessible parts and produced clear maps and reports, that drew attention 'to the most important of all mineral regions, the West Coast Range.'<sup>60</sup>

From the reports and maps prepared by Gould, it is apparent that he and his teams covered much territory around the Mount Lyell district. They certainly camped on or passed over areas of significant mineralisation that contained copper, reef and alluvial gold. No doubt inclement weather, impenetrable vegetation, rough terrain and sheer isolation combined to make survival a priority. It may be further argued that because of the dense scrub and vast tracts of tall rain forest, the geological rock strata were not readily visible, making interpretation of the region difficult for Gould. Whatever excuses are made, it is apparent that Gould and his parties were ill-prepared and lacking

<sup>55</sup> Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, p. 182.

<sup>56</sup> C Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches & Beauty*, Queenstown, Robert Sticht Memorial Library, 1949 (reprint of 1923 edition), p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour - Report of the Government Geologist, 1862, Sketch Map attachment to paper 26.

<sup>58</sup> Mining of copper at Mount Lyell was a continuous operation from 1893 to December 1994, ceasing briefly before recommenced by new operators from late 1996 until the current day, a life-span of one hundred and eleven years.

<sup>59</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour-Report of the Government Geologist, paper 26, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, p. 192.



in the necessary mining and prospecting experience to have a reasonable chance of success within the wilds of the West Coast. Gould's previous geological survey experience gained in England, combined with that obtained from his brief tour of the Victorian goldfields, would not have conditioned him for the physical, mental or geological challenges that the region presented.

Following Gould's last expedition to the West Coast and Clarke's all-encompassing predictions dispelled, speculation in gold exploration on the West Coast waned considerably. Over the next two decades few people ventured via the overland track to the Mount Lyell region. Macquarie Harbour also lay dormant, excepting the piners who 'came and went and left few records.'<sup>61</sup> Without a major mineral discovery, the Island's economy did not fare well. The key exports of timber, grain and wool had all fallen and in the latter half of the decade the cost of imports had generally exceeded exports.<sup>62</sup> Tasmania had entered into a severe economic depression, causing the government to slash departmental budgets and attempt to impose new taxes and increase existing customs duties. During this period vast areas of Crown land were surveyed and opened up, the activity of servicing and developing these new rural communities providing 'a welcome counter-point to the prevailing mood of stagnation and depression.'<sup>63</sup>

With little money to finance further mineral exploration, the government considered offering incentives and rewards to rekindle private interest. In his 10 February 1868 letter to the Colonial Secretary, local lawyer and entrepreneur, Joseph Allport suggested offering land at reduced values to companies opening up and exploring unsettled lands in the Western Districts. He contended that partial research had been already completed at the expense of individuals, but exploration and track clearing activities were capital intensive and without incentives shareholders would not be enticed to subscribe the necessary funds to finance the high-risk ventures. Interestingly, Allport was particularly interested in finding copper ore that was thought to co-exist with igneous rocks, which could be located at many points between Port Davey and the North Coast.<sup>64</sup> Little came of Allport's proposed venture, although in the coming years governments did pay rewards, grant pensions, offer land incentives and organise other prescribed rights to successful individuals and companies. The

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<sup>61</sup> G Kerr & H McDermott, *The Huon Pine Story – The History of Harvest and Use of a Unique Timber*, Victoria, Mainsail Books, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1890, 1891, paper 150, statistical summary pp. 6-8.

<sup>63</sup> WA Townsley, *Tasmania – From Colony to Statehood 1803-1945*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1991, pp. 103-104.

incentives and promises offered towards the end of the nineteenth century to several railway consortia that had expressed interest in building lines to connect the major eastern cities and Mount Lyell were controversial.<sup>65</sup>

### **Exploration – Mineral Discoveries in the Western Mining District**

By the early 1870's the government had taken a back seat in mineral exploration activities. Gould's earlier prediction that discovery would be left to the chance of casual investigation was now a distinct reality. Isolated from the rest of the colony, and protected by inhospitable terrain and unrelenting barriers of impenetrable vegetation, the wilds of the West Coast continued to discourage all but the hardest of explorers from journeying deep into its interior. James "Philosopher" Smith was one individual who did possess the necessary survival skills. He maintained the strong belief that there was a wealth of hidden mineral treasures to be found within the western wilderness. A superb bushman, well versed in prospecting techniques and prepared to spend long periods away from home, Smith is credited with 'the genesis of the entire mining industry of Western Tasmania.'<sup>66</sup> Nic Haygarth rightly contends that Smith's discovery 'widened not only Tasmania's principally agrarian economic base, but the vision of its then unsuccessful gold prospectors, who were thereby encouraged to search out other minerals.'<sup>67</sup>

Smith's timely 4 December 1871 discovery of rich tin deposits at Mount Bischoff, on the northern most extent of the West Coast mineral belt, proved the necessary catalyst to stimulate the flagging interest in the Island's mineral resources. His find was considered to be 'the main factor in bringing a period of prosperity to Tasmania following the prolonged economic depression.'<sup>68</sup> The Mount Bischoff tin deposits were extensive and of a very high grade, but being isolated amid the rainforest, some fifty miles inland from the nearest seaport, presented major problems to mining development. Bullocks and drays were initially employed to carry the tin ore to Burnie and for the back-hauling of machinery and provisions to the mine. Before long the

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<sup>64</sup> HAJ, Minerals on the North Coast – Letter from Mr. Allport to the Hon. Colonial Secretary, 1868, Paper 95.

<sup>65</sup> Generous incentives were offered by Government to the Emu Bay Railway Company and the Great Western Railway and Electric Ore-reduction Company, which is discussed in chapter 5 covering railway issues.

<sup>66</sup> K Pink, *And Wealth For Toil – A History of North-West and Western Tasmania 1825 - 1900*, Burnie, Advocate Printers (Burnie) Pty Ltd, 1990, p. 319.

<sup>67</sup> N Haygarth, 'The Father of Tasmania'?: Measuring the Legend of James 'Philosopher' Smith', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2003, Summary, page un-numbered.

<sup>68</sup> DI Groves, EL Martin, H Murcie & HK Wellington, *A Century of Tin Mining at Mount Bischoff, 1871-1971*, Hobart, Tasmania Department of Mines, 1972, p. 15.

heavy traffic blocked the often boggy tracks. Eventually, the drays were replaced by a horse drawn tramway and then by a railway. It was opened on 15 July 1884, much to the relief of the Mount Bischoff Company and the travelling public.<sup>69</sup>

Transport was to be a vital element in the development of the West Coast's mineral resources. The Bischoff tramway, then railway, facilitated further mineral exploration to the south, replacing both the laborious overland trek and the dangerous sea access. Once the value of Smith's discovery had been confirmed, prospectors began to move south from Mount Bischoff. They followed the granite country towards the Pieman River, exploring the rivers and tributaries, investigating outcrops and exposed reefs as they went. Charles Sprent, District Surveyor, considered that many of the prospectors possessed little geological knowledge and so many valuable mineral deposits were 'passed over simply because the men do not recognise their nature.'<sup>70</sup> Conversely, the inability accurately to identify the finds created many false hopes and expectations when valueless deposits were eagerly mined or panned in the anticipation of being valuable minerals.

Over the next twenty or so years the western mining district was explored by the "first wave" of prospectors. These men who patiently examined the uncharted ground, foot by foot, within the wilds, would be responsible for the discovery of the major mineral fields. Many went without reward for their efforts, while others sold out for minimal return only to see the beneficiaries take the credit and prosper. The life of the early prospector was indeed difficult. Their guiding light 'was the hope – the chance - that the next day's or next week's work would reveal the find which would justify the weary months of hacking and washing and digging.'<sup>71</sup> During the summer of 1875/76 government surveyor Charles Sprent explored the region between Mount Bischoff and Mount Heemskirk, reporting small quantities of gold, tin and iridium.<sup>72</sup>

The following summer, brothers George and Owen Meredith, after landing at the bar near the entrance to Macquarie Harbour on 4 December 1876, walked northwards up the Coast as far as the Pieman River. Prospecting about the area on 11 February 1877, they located a rich pocket of tin north west of Mount Heemskirk. News of the find sparked considerable interest in the area. Sprent carried out further track cutting works and explored to the north of the Pieman River during the early months of 1877. This time he reported finding iron ore, copper, platinum, osmiridium and small

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<sup>69</sup> LG Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, Lou Rae, 1997, pp. 20-34.

<sup>70</sup> HAJ, West Coast – Mr Sprent's Report on its Mineral Resources, 1878, Paper 51, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> CJ Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1988, p. 10.

quantities of gold. Although he did not discover any major mineral fields, Sprent's assessment of the region would prove accurate:

The western country is rich in minerals, and will ultimately become an important part of the colony. Utterly worthless for agricultural or pastoral purposes it has hitherto been but little explored...the country is exceedingly rough, and what scrubs there are grow so thick that a whole day is sometimes occupied in getting across a single river gully.<sup>73</sup>

Sprent was concerned about the poor access to the Heemskirk area. He dismissed the Pieman River as being too dangerous to enter and, instead, proposed the construction of a tramroad between Mount Heemskirk and Macquarie Harbour. He considered that 'a permanent settlement near Macquarie Harbour will be a material assistance to the welfare of the Colony.'<sup>74</sup> Importantly, Sprent also urged the government to further open up more country for the prospectors by providing a network of tracks. Macquarie Harbour was earmarked as a focal point for the region. Surveyor James Scott recommended that tracks be cut to link the area with Circular Head (100 miles), Lake St Clair (65 miles), the Repulse River (90 miles) and Port Davey (80 miles).<sup>75</sup>

Scott commenced work on the project in early 1877, identifying a route between Lake St Clair, via the King's River to the Pieman River, and on to Waratah. While exploring in the Mount Lyell area, Scott named Mount Tyndall, the name chosen as being 'an appropriate continuation of the sequence of names of eminent men of science given by Gould to the peaks of the West Coast Range, of which it is one.'<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, Scott died before completing his track works and surveyor Edward Counsel completed the task the following year. Utilising sections of Gould's 1862 track, Counsel chose to avoid the Queen River Valley and crossed the West Coast Range between Mounts Lyell and Sedgwick, before turning north towards the Pieman River.<sup>77</sup> Surveyor Thomas Frodsham was employed the same year to cut a track between the Great Bend on the Gordon River and Macquarie Harbour. Protracted

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<sup>72</sup> HAJ, Exploration in Western Country – Letter of the Hon. JR Scott, MLC, to the Minister of Lands and Works, 1876, Paper 104, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> HAJ, Western Country: Reports by the Hon JR Scott and Mr CP Sprent, 1877, Paper 27, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> HAJ, West Coast – Mr Sprent's Report on its Mineral Resources, 1878, Paper 51, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> HAJ, Exploration in Western Country, – Letter of the Hon. JR Scott, MLC, to the Minister of Lands and Works, 1876, Paper 104, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> HAJ, Western Country: Reports by the Hon JR Scott and Mr CP Sprent, 1877, Paper 27, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> HAJ, West Coast – Mr Surveyor Counsel's Report on Track from Lake St Clair to the Pieman River, 1878, Paper 47, p. 4.

periods of rain, hail and sleet left his party wet through and nearly benumbed, forcing Frodsham to retreat without completing the track.<sup>78</sup>

As the Mount Bischoff Tin Mine prospered, followed by the discovery of other significant mineral deposits along the length and breadth of the West Coast, an air of confidence slowly returned to the colony. The lack of accurate maps still hampered the ability to perform a systematic exploration of the region. Scott's map of 1877 had perpetuated many of Gould's previous errors. The official boundaries of the Western Mining District lacked descriptive detail, being gazetted as 'all that portion of the Colony of Tasmania and its Dependencies which is not comprised within the boundaries of the Eastern Mining District.'<sup>79</sup>

During the latter part of the 1870's, Charles Sprent continued to champion the need for a port at Macquarie Harbour. It was the only safe anchorage on the West Coast and ideally located to serve as the gateway to the region. Many prospectors at the time already used the harbour as a landing and pick-up point. Explorer Mark Ireland reported on two expeditions leaving Hobart, the first party on 7 October 1877 led by Charles Donnelly aboard the *Coral*, and Ireland's group which left a day later aboard the *Priscilla*. Both parties were bound for Macquarie Harbour. Unfortunately for Ireland and those aboard the *Priscilla*, bad weather impeded the boat's progress and, after returning to Hobart for more provisions, it was not until 25 December that it eventually sailed into Macquarie Harbour. As Ireland remarked after seventy-nine days in transit, 'this is, I think an easy record, and for this luxury we paid £15 per head and tuckered ourselves.'<sup>80</sup>

Ireland and party eventually made their way to Swan Basin in search of Donnelly, who had arrived safely weeks before and had built a depot for storing food in a small bay north of the entrance. The shed was attended by a George Smith, his name being adopted for the settlement of Smith Cove, later altered to Old Strahan.<sup>81</sup> On leaving the store, Ireland headed towards the Pieman River, while Cornelius (Con) Lynch and his

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<sup>78</sup> HAJ, West Coast – Mr Surveyor Frodsham's Report on Track from Florentine River Westward across the Gordon River towards Macquarie Harbour, 1878, Paper 48, pp. 4 & 5.

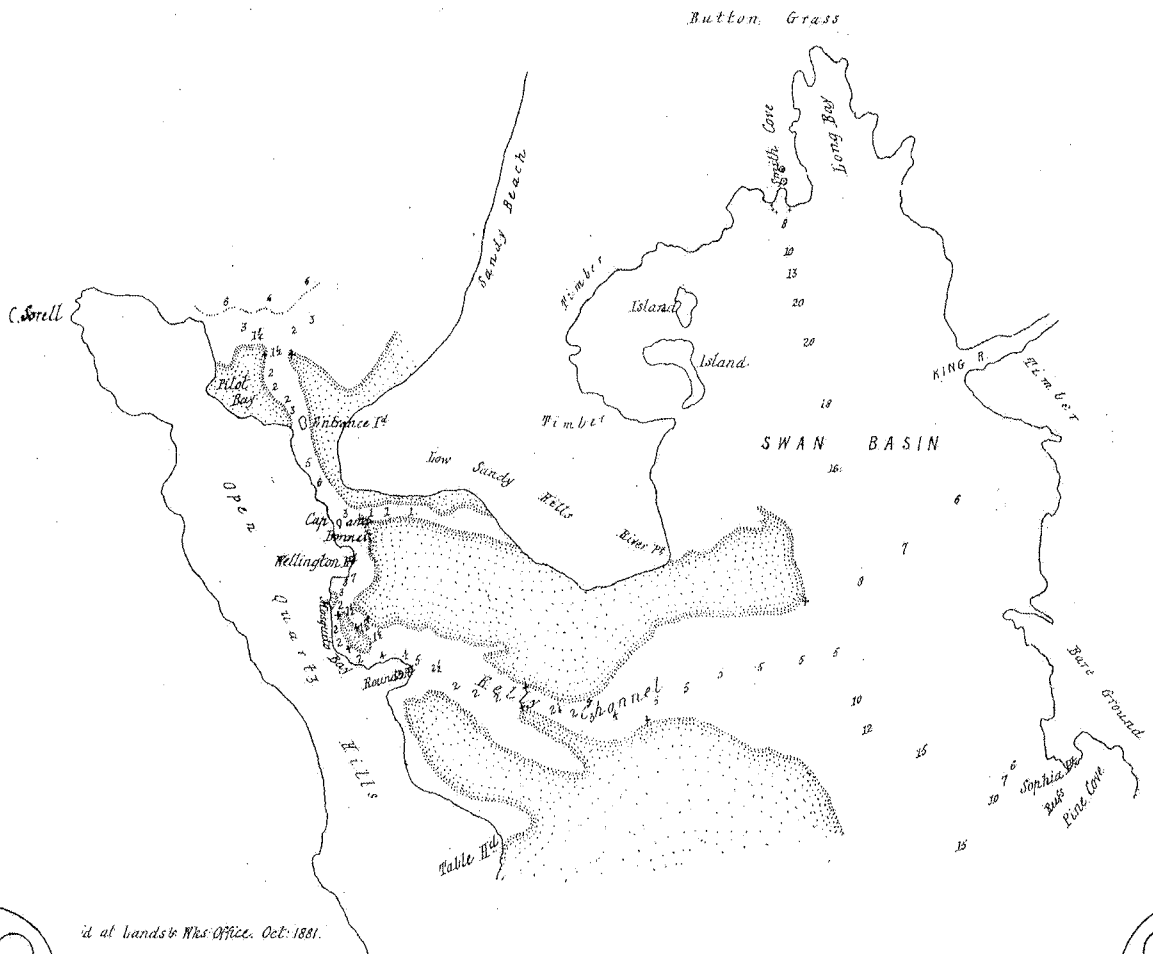
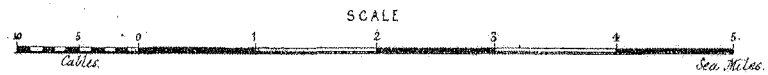
<sup>79</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 2 April 1878, page 573. The eastern mining district comprised the far north-east and east coast areas of Tasmania, and is described in detail on page 573.

<sup>80</sup> M Ireland, *Pioneering on North-East Coast and West Coast of Tasmania from 1876 to 1913*, Launceston, undated, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, pp. 19-20. Binks makes reference to Smith's Cove but a map prepared by Charles Sprent in 1881 and subsequent official documentation identify the name to be Smith Cove. The settlement was renamed Strahan in 1882, but then became known as Old Strahan upon the re-siting of port activities in Long Bay a short time later.

SKETCH BY C.P. SPRENT  
OF  
PORTION OF MACQUARIE HARBOUR  
SHEWING POSITION OF CHANNELS & PLACES WHERE BUOYS ARE REQUIRED

NOTE. + DENOTES WHERE BUOYS ARE REQUIRED



MAP 6 - MACQUARIE HARBOUR AREA OCTOBER 1881

group made for the King River<sup>82</sup> ferrying their provisions between Swan Basin and the mouth of the King River.<sup>83</sup>

Thomas Currie and Jim Lenahan accompanied Lynch on his journey up the King River, traversing a section of the dangerous gorge until the junction of the Queen River was reached. Here they established a camp. The small quantities of gold found in the vicinity did not reward their hard efforts and they returned to Smith Cove virtually empty-handed. Unlike Mount Bischoff, the tin field at North Heemskirk did not live up to its initial promise. The final months of 1878 saw the local prospectors searching for gold in the streams on the northern banks of the Pieman River. Few fortunes were made during these typically short-lived rushes on the West Coast, though some made good wages for a brief period.<sup>84</sup>

The discovery of the rich alluvial tin deposits at Mount Heemskirk during 1879 highlighted the 'intractable problem of transporting the required machinery for deep mining to the ore field.'<sup>85</sup> The government faced a dilemma. It was uncertain as to whether it should provide expensive infrastructure or whether it should wait for commercial interests to underwrite the works. The latter option appeared unlikely as the mineral discoveries on the Coast were scattered. Aware of the growing value of the mineral industry to the performance of the colony, government could justify outlaying money on West Coast improvements. Over the decade 1871 to 1880, timber and grain exports had continued to struggle, while wool values had fluctuated. During this same period the values of the minerals won climbed steadily. In 1871, prior to the compilation of mineral production records, Tasmania's total annual export revenue amounted to £740,638. By 1880 the total exports had risen to £1,511,931, of which tin and gold amounted to £543,391, or 35.9 per cent of total exports.<sup>86</sup>

Population and economic growth for the colony were indeed promising. During the years 1876 to 1880 the numbers of immigrants exceed emigrants, increasing the population by 11,099 to 114,763. The first five years of the decade had produced a net

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<sup>82</sup> As a note, the Sketch Map of the route taken by JR Scott, from Lake St Clair, via Pieman River, to Mount Bischoff and Emu Bay, in March & April 1877, the spelling has changed from King's River in his report (HAJ, paper 27 of 1877, p. 3 refers) to that of King River. To avoid confusion all subsequent references in this thesis will use King River. Refer to Track Plan 48, Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment.

<sup>83</sup> Ireland, *Pioneering on North-East Coast and West Coast of Tasmania from 1876 to 1913*, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Roberts, *The Role of Government in the Development of the Tasmanian Metal Mining Industry: 1803 – 1883*, p. 110.

<sup>86</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1890, 1891, paper 150, statistical summary pp. 6-8.

gain of 1,878. Economically, the value of exports had generally outstripped that of imports and government revenue now began consistently to exceed expenditure.<sup>87</sup>

As mining interest increased, the shackles binding the “last frontier status” of the region were slowly being loosened. In demonstrating a growing independence, those living in the area stood to gain greater autonomy, reducing their reliance on Hobart based public servants and the municipal officers from Hamilton<sup>88</sup> for direction. Evidence of the West Coast’s growing importance came with the need continually to redefine the island’s mining districts. From being “everything west of Fingal” in 1878, the Western Mining District became more accurately defined, in keeping with the mineral discoveries and the area’s physical confines. Its boundaries were amended three times alone in 1881, on 21 March,<sup>89</sup> 2 August,<sup>90</sup> and finally, on 1 November, to read as:

Commencing at the mouth of the River Arthur and bounded by that river for a distance of about 20 miles, thence by a south-easterly line to the south-west angle of the Surrey Hills Block, by the south boundary of that block to the south-east angle thereof, thence by a southerly line to Frenchman’s Cap, and by a continued southerly line to the River Gordon, thence by a westerly line to the sea near to and south of Point Hibbs, and thence by the sea northerly to the point of commencement.<sup>91</sup>

During the 1880’s the economic wealth of Tasmania continued to strengthen. The rising tide of prosperity led to newfound confidence and a higher standard of living. The turnaround in fortunes was attributed to improving communications and the discovery, extraction and export of minerals.<sup>92</sup> Tasmania’s longstanding rural based industries continued to struggle. Timber and grain exports declined in value and wool stocks fell marginally. Mineral production had increased significantly over that of the previous decade, with outputs for tin and gold accounting for more than 30 per cent of the island’s total exports for eight years during the 1880’s, reaching a peak of 41.52 per cent in 1888.<sup>93</sup> The government’s role in fostering the expansion of the mining program was essential. In January 1883 it had created the Mines Branch as a separate entity within the Department of Lands and Works. This provided greater direction and

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<sup>87</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1890, 1891, paper 150, statistical summary pp. 3-8.

<sup>88</sup> At the time (1882) Smith Cove formed part of the Municipality of Hamilton, the municipal offices being located in that town, located some fifty miles to the west of Hobart.

<sup>89</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 21 March 1881, p.488.

<sup>90</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 2 August 1881, p. 1307.

<sup>91</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 1 November 1881, p. 1613.

<sup>92</sup> Townsley, *Tasmania From Colony to Statehood 1803 – 1945*, p. 132.

<sup>93</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1893, 1894, paper 89, statistical summary pp. 6-7.



supervision to the rapidly emerging industry.<sup>94</sup> The scattered West Coast goldfields were gaining in prominence. Gustav Thureau, the Inspector of Mines, reported that wherever the miners had succeeded in penetrating the almost inaccessible gold country, their earnings had been very satisfactory. Thureau contended that the goldfield was the equal of any other in the colonies. All that was required was 'a larger population, main tracks from one deposit to another, and facilities for provisions, in order to develop this extensive and rich goldfield.'<sup>95</sup>

In his 1885 Annual Report, Secretary for Mines, Bernard Shaw noted the important judicial role played by the new Mines Branch in the protection of the rights of individual prospectors and miners. Within the isolated wilds of the Western District, the diggers needed to be guarded against 'a class of men who were ever ready to follow upon their heels, and dispute with them the possession of any valuable deposits they might be so fortunate as to find.'<sup>96</sup> Commissioner William Glover was appointed to administer licence disputes and occupational claims for the District. He was initially stationed at Trial Harbour before being moved to Waratah. The decision to locate the Commissioner's Office within the District signified bureaucratic recognition of the problems occurring in remote areas. It also provided a judicial process essential to the protection of those willing to prospect and develop the mineral resources within the district. Glover's job was described as 'arduous and laborious, involving long and wearisome journeys over almost impassable tracks, and through difficult and comparatively unknown country.'<sup>97</sup>

The practicality of the Commissioner's relocation to Waratah was openly questioned as it was not central to the District, nor was it located near the developing mining fields of Zeehan or Mount Lyell. Waratah offered a rail connection to Burnie and relatively civilised amenities, the town having grown considerably since Philosopher Smith's 1871 discovery of tin at Mount Bischoff. The town's benefactor, the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company, was by now very famous for its monthly dividends paid to investors.<sup>98</sup> Glover's tenure at Waratah proved to be short-lived. Following a review by the Mines Department during 1887/88, the mining districts were again redefined to reflect the strong growth of the central West Coast area. The reorganisation saw Waratah moved to the North-Western Division and the

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<sup>94</sup> HAJ, The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1884, paper 70, pp. 3-4.

<sup>95</sup> JPPP, Report of Inspector of Mines for 1884, 1885, paper 59, p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> JPPP, The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1885, paper 58, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1885, 1886 paper 71, p. 3.

Commissioner's Office for the Western Division relocated to Strahan. The Western Division now included 'the whole of the West Coast country from the Pieman River southwards, including the Tin-fields at Heemskirk, the extensive Silver country at Mount Zeehan, with the Gold-mining centres at the Linda, King, and Queen Rivers, the Princess River, and other auriferous country.'<sup>99</sup>

Renewed interest in the Zeehan silver field, located some thirty miles to the north of Strahan, near Mount Zeehan, during 1888 had created considerable excitement in the Western Division. When first discovered by Frank Long on 8 December 1882, the silver-rich galena had attracted only mediocre attention. A combination of poor access, low mineral prices and investor disinterest saw the development placed on hold.<sup>100</sup> Upon the eventual improvement in metal prices, assisted by the fame created by the rich silver-lead-zinc deposits at Broken Hill, interest was again rekindled in the Zeehan silver ores. Further extensive lodes of galena were soon discovered about the precincts of Mount Zeehan, causing Thureau to express great confidence in the region's future. Buoyed by the new silver boom, the government acted quickly to investigate transport options. The hitherto prohibitive costs of forwarding small tonnages by the rough dray track to Trial Harbour was noted in Thureau's December 1888 report to the Secretary of Mines. Thureau expressed his gratification that Parliament had voted funds to undertake a railway survey for a line between Strahan and Mount Zeehan. He considered the construction of smelting works at Strahan and the building of the railway to be 'the solution of the whole difficulty there can be no doubt.'<sup>101</sup>

### **Exploration - The King River and Linda Valley Goldfield**

Prior to 1882 the majority of the exploration about the Western District had been concentrated in the Heemskirk and Pieman River areas, well to the north of Strahan. As discoveries declined in these localities, interest switched to the hinterland to the east of Strahan. Towards the end of 1881 Tom Currie and Con Lynch were among the first prospectors into this area. Both men were returning after an absence of four years. Accompanying them to Farm Cove, located on the northern shores of Macquarie Harbour, were George Tarrant and a Mr Mason. The party's intent was to follow Gould's previous tracks about the area. Splitting into two, Lynch and Mason made their

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<sup>98</sup> G Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2003, p. 208.

<sup>99</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1887-8, 1888, paper 47, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> WH Twelvetees and LK Ward, *The Ore-Bodies of the Zeehan Field*, Hobart, Department of Mines, 1910, p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> JPPP, Mount Zeehan Silver and Argentiferous Lead Lodes and Other Ore Deposits: Report by Mr G Thureau, 1888, paper 144, p. 7.

way north, skirting the foothills of Mounts Sorell and Darwin, towards the King River. Currie and Tarrant headed for Frenchman's Cap, but their trek proved fruitless. The four men regrouped at Lynch and Currie's former campsite near the junction of the King and Queen Rivers.<sup>102</sup>

From the camp, Currie and Tarrant worked their way up the Queen River, while Lynch concentrated his efforts about Newell Creek. Currie is attributed with making the first substantial discovery in the area when he panned a pennyweight of gold in a small tributary off the Queen River.<sup>103</sup> This creek was later named Lynch's Creek, as it was Lynch who eventually pegged out the claim. Lynch's efforts around Newell Creek produced small quantities of gold, but not in the same quantities as won by Currie. The party concentrated its efforts around the area of Currie's discovery until supplies ran low. Returning to Smith Cove, via Farm Cove, the men restocked their provisions at FO Henry's store. On their return they opted to retrace Lynch and Currie's 1877 direct route along the King River and through the gorge to the Queen River camp. It was an extremely gruelling trip, causing Currie to remark that the 'difficulties in the "gorge" seemed greater than on our previous excursion.'<sup>104</sup>

Upon returning to the site of Currie's discovery, Lynch proceeded to peg the claim while Currie and Tarrant continued to prospect further up the Queen River Valley towards the saddle between Mounts Owen and Lyell. Here Gould had surveyed the western expanse nearly twenty years before.<sup>105</sup> The journey proved sapping for Currie and he collapsed close to what duly became the Mount Lyell Copper Mine. He was assisted back to Smith Cove, returning to Hobart to recuperate. Lynch remained at the gold diggings in order to secure the site. Currie and Lynch's expedition proved to be crucial in the exploration of the area and in the ultimate discovery of the Mount Lyell Mining Field. Con Lynch played a significant role in the ongoing development of the Queen River area. He opened up access to the district by cutting a track commencing at the "Top Landing", located at the highest navigable point on the King River, up along Sailor Jack Creek to the saddle at what was to become Rinadeena, then down into the Queen River Valley via Hall's Creek. This track avoided the difficult path through the King River Gorge and would form the route of the Abt Railway a little over a decade later.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>103</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 June 1909.

<sup>104</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 June 1909.

<sup>105</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 June 1909.

<sup>106</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, p. 32.



News of Currie's and Lynch's discovery at Lynchs Creek sparked an initial rush of prospectors in the winter of 1882.<sup>107</sup> Currie, Lynch and Tarrant retained their interest in the area and, in conjunction with willing backers, they formed the King River Prospecting Association. The consortium was registered on 24 November 1882.<sup>108</sup> Lynch's sustained efforts paid dividends. In early 1883 he discovered a pocket of quartz at the King River Mine which weighed 112 pounds and yielded £830 17s.9d., a large sum of money at the time.<sup>109</sup> Buoyed by Lynch's success, the King River Company sought to expand its activities. Speculators were attracted to the proposal, but were poorly informed as to the many difficulties and costs associated with mining in such an isolated district. The venture was registered on 10 May 1883 as The King River Prospecting and Gold Mining Association, Registered, No Liability.<sup>110</sup> Currie, Lynch and Tarrant all retained an interest in the new Company. Unfortunately, as with many of the early speculative ventures on the West Coast, the sporadic mineral discoveries did not support the high mining and transport overheads. The new Company fared poorly, spending £20,000 for a return of £3,345 from the gold recovered.<sup>111</sup>

Poor access and long wet periods did not aid mining activities. The journey from Strahan was particularly arduous and involved rowing a boat up the King River as far as the rapids after which:

...all hands had to jump out, often up to their necks in water, and haul the boat over rapid after rapid in quick succession, and this for fully three miles, until the top landing...was reached. Here the contents of the boat were put up in packs; these were mounted on the men's backs, and thus the sturdy pioneers proceeded with them to their destination (Lynch's Creek), seven to nine miles distant, by means of a track which was no better than a badly blazed line through ugly scrub and over broken country.<sup>112</sup>

One harrowing trip via this route was generally enough especially when the rewards were poor. By March 1883 only seventeen prospectors remained on the field. Thomas Bather Moore blamed the low population on the poor overland communication with Macquarie Harbour.<sup>113</sup> Moore, born in 1850 at New Norfolk, was a competent prospector and explorer. He was also well-versed in geological and botanical matters

<sup>107</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, p. 32.

<sup>108</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 28 November 1882, p. 743.

<sup>109</sup> JW Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, Melbourne, Australasian Institute of Mining Engineers, 1905, pp. 13-14. The section on the early mining history in Gregory's book was written by William Henry T aylour, editor of the *Mount Lyell Standard* from 28 November 1896 to 14 September 1898.

<sup>110</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 15 May 1883, p. 728.

<sup>111</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, p. 14.

<sup>112</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 28 November 1896.

<sup>113</sup> HAJ, Exploration – Mr TB Moore's report upon the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour, 1883, paper 56, p. 7.

and eventually ‘came to know the west better than any other man.’<sup>114</sup> Moore had been commissioned by government to report on the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour for the purpose of establishing a reliable overland route to the West. After arriving at Mount Arrowsmith on 12 February 1883, he was delayed by severe snow and rain for nearly ten days. Instead of following Gould’s old track to the west of the mountain, Moore proceeded along the easier grades on the eastern side. From Mount Arrowsmith he travelled in a westerly direction to the Collingwood River Valley, then via the Nelson River Valley to Long Marsh, on the King River. Describing his route, Moore recounted: ‘during all my experience in track-cutting and exploring the country from the South to the West Coast, the course marked as the proposed road far excels any yet travelled over, and is the only one that can be conscientiously recommended to the Government for proposed construction.’<sup>115</sup>

While in the Mount Lyell area, Moore had visited the Lynch’s Creek camp and befriended Con Lynch. Lynch’s intimate knowledge of the district proved invaluable to Moore. The few maps he carried lacked detail and perpetuated the errors and assumptions made by previous explorers. With Lynch’s help, Moore was able to identify anomalies concerning the recorded route of the King River, which had been incorrectly plotted by Gould two decades earlier. Moore subsequently tracked the river’s path into the narrow gorge between Mounts Huxley and Jukes. After climbing Mount Huxley he reported to have ‘obtained a good view of an extensive area of country; the position of the mount and course of the King River I carefully fixed.’<sup>116</sup> Moore later acknowledged the early efforts of Lynch and Currie. He considered them to be the real pioneers of the country between Farm Cove and Mount Lyell. Their role as track cutters could not be understated. Some years later Moore reflected ‘in those days there were only a few of us who cut tracks, but hundreds followed in our wake.’<sup>117</sup>

At the same time Moore was pushing through with his overland track, George Meredith was employed to cut a path from Long Bay (Macquarie Harbour) to near Lynch’s Creek, at a cost of £100.<sup>118</sup> Completed around May 1883, the route became known as Meredith’s Track. It linked with Moore’s overland track near Honeysuckle

<sup>114</sup> I McShane, ‘Thomas Bather Moore (1850-1919)’, *ADB*, vol. 10, p. 571.

<sup>115</sup> HAJ, Exploration – Mr TB Moore’s report upon the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour, 1883, paper 56, p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> HAJ, Exploration – Mr TB Moore’s report upon the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour, 1883, paper 56, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 5 December 1896.

<sup>118</sup> HAJ, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-In-Chief, 1883, paper 59, p. 68.

Plain, located on the western side of the Queen River.<sup>119</sup> By avoiding the boat trip on the King River, Meredith's track was considered safer than Lynch's old route. Nevertheless, it covered very difficult country and it gained the reputation as being one of the severest on the West Coast. It took two days to traverse and in places the vegetation comprised a succession of 'ti-tree and bauera swamps, with patches of "horizontal", all being intertwined with "cutting-grass" in abundance.'<sup>120</sup>

The completion of the two tracks did improve access to the Lyell area, but neither was suited to pack-horses or for carting heavy mining equipment. Prospectors making their way from the declining Pieman goldfields and the Heemskirk tinfield used Meredith's track. Upon arriving at Lynch's Creek they spread out, panning the many small creeks that flowed into the Queen River and about Mount Lyell. Promising gold bearing reefs were discovered in the nearby Princess Creek and at the Macquarie and Madam Howard Mines on Howard's Plains, formerly known as Honeysuckle Plains. As with Lynch's Creek, some rich specimens were obtained from these mines. However, much of the ore 'proved barren, or at least too poor to treat profitably.'<sup>121</sup> The fortunes of the Mount Lyell area ebbed and flowed through 1882-83. Bernard Shaw, Secretary of Mines, commented on the difficulties facing the new gold field: 'The inaccessible nature of the country, and the great hardship and privation to which miners are subjected, especially at this season of the year, have operated as a hindrance to further work, and effectually retarded the development of the gold field.'<sup>122</sup>

Among the prospectors arriving from Heemskirk in the latter half of 1883 were Steve Karlson and William and Mick McDonough, who were also known as the Cooney brothers.<sup>123</sup> In November 1883 the trio left their camp at Howard's Plains and made their way across the Queen River, and headed for the gap that separated Mounts Owen and Lyell. Their trek to the Linda Valley<sup>124</sup> followed the path blazed by Gould in 1862, re-cut by Currie and Tarrant the previous year, and followed by Moore and party in the early months of 1883. Also visiting the area was Thomas Moore who, accompanied by

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<sup>119</sup> HAJ, Exploration – Mr TB Moore's report upon the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour, 1883, paper 56, p. 5. A short time after Moore's visit Honeysuckle Plain became known locally as Howard's Plain.

<sup>120</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>121</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> HAJ, The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1884, paper 70, p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> According to Blainey, the McDonough brothers had temporarily used their mother's maiden name of Cooney while working at Waratah, prior to making their trip to Mount Lyell. Research of the Mount Lyell Company records reveals reference to the name McDonough only – which has been used in this thesis.

<sup>124</sup> This area had been originally named Vale of Chamouni by Gould, who had also named the Linda Creek, that flowed from Mount Lyell through the Vale to the King River.

his brother James, had returned to Mount Lyell in the hope of finding gold. Thomas had been previously advised by Con Lynch to concentrate his efforts on the ironstone outcrop, which became known as the “Iron Blow”,<sup>125</sup> located to the eastern side of the ridge, on the foothills of Mount Lyell. Moore had previously located samples of copper and iron pyrites from this area during his track-cutting expedition, but he had not returned earlier as gold had not been detected amongst the samples he had taken back to Hobart for analysis.<sup>126</sup> Moore respected Lynch’s advice, for he intended to examine the ironstone outcrop. However, before reaching the top of the ridge, the brothers discovered traces of gold on its western approaches, which delayed their trip.<sup>127</sup>

The McDonoughs and Karlson had met with the Moores at their camp and were provided with helpful directions to locate Currie’s track to the top of the ridge. As Thomas Moore was to later lament, he had thought the three new chums were only prospecting the creeks and that he would be able to make his way to the ironstone outcrop at his leisure. It is apparent that Karlson and the McDonoughs did not initially head to the outcrop, preferring to look for alluvial gold in the adjacent creeks. After running short of provisions, they trekked to Howard’s Plains to replenish their stocks and then returned to the Linda Valley accompanied by more prospectors eager to explore the area. This time Bill McDonough made for the “Iron Blow” where he panned an excellent prospect. It was soon apparent to the three men that the huge iron boulder outcrop capped the source of the gold found in the Linda Valley below.<sup>128</sup>

The pegging of the 50 acre claim, referred to as the “Iron Blow”, heralded mining at what would become the longest continually mined copper mine in Australia. It was around Christmas 1883 that Bill McDonough returned to the Linda Valley after walking some two hundred and forty miles to Waratah and back to secure their interest with the mines commissioner.<sup>129</sup> Over the ensuing years Karlson and the McDonoughs sold their interests in the “Iron Blow” for generally meagre returns. The nature of the transfer of the early shares led to a number of court cases. The initial share transactions are covered briefly later in this chapter, while a comprehensive history is provided by Blainey in *The Peaks of Lyell*.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The ironstone outcrop was to become known as the “Iron Blow”, its surface deposits containing payable amounts of gold while below the boulders a large and valuable copper ore resource would be discovered and proven in the decade that followed. Some years after mining commenced in earnest, the Iron Blow was referred to as the Mount Lyell mine.

<sup>126</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 5 December 1896.

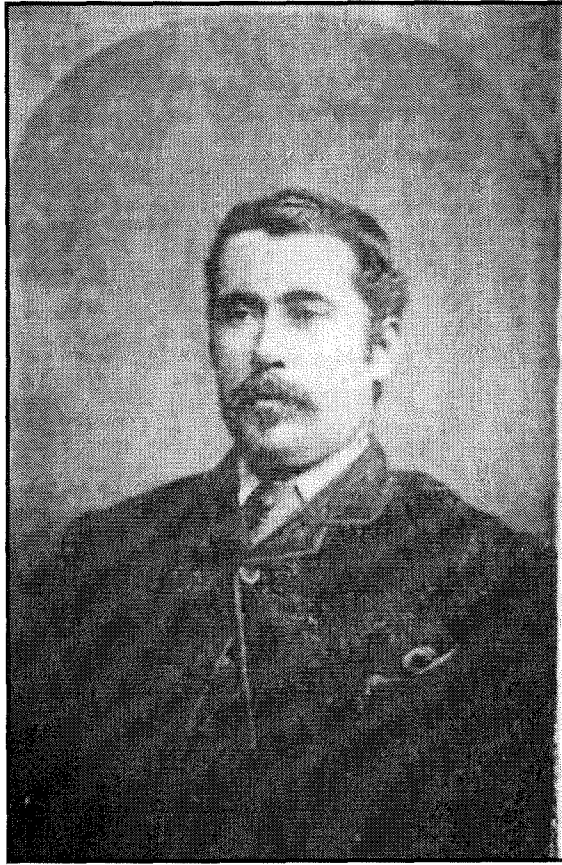
<sup>127</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 May 1919.

<sup>128</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, pp. 14-15.

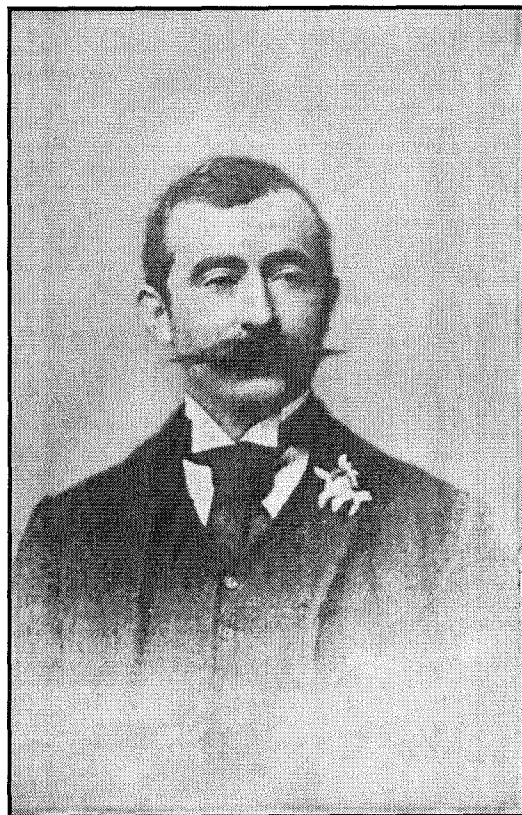
<sup>129</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>130</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 29-41.





**WILLIAM McDONOUGH – CO DISCOVERER IRON BLOW MINE**



**MICHAEL McDONOUGH – CO DISCOVERER IRON BLOW MINE**

The will of the early explorers, track cutters and prospectors had prevailed under the most trying circumstances. Alexander Montgomery, Inspector of Mines, penned this tribute to the prospectors of the West Coast:

The prospector – pioneer of the wildest wastes – is still pushing on; neither hardships nor danger can daunt his persevering courage. Though the swollen river sullenly roar across his path, though frightful scrubs entangle him in heartbreaking toils, though the inclement sky pour ceaseless rain upon him, yet do they not prevail to drive him back. Forward, still forward, is his resistless march, till the conquered crag glows red in the blaze of his cheery camp fire, and the gloomy valley re-echoes the ring of his axe. The rough places he makes smooth, and into the dismal dens he lets light, till the beaten demons of the mine fly affrighted and yield to him their long-guarded treasures. All honour to the undaunted heart that faces and overcomes the wilderness! He well deserves the grateful thanks of his country.<sup>131</sup>

While developments in the Zeehan area had been placed on hold during the mid 1880's, exploration of the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield had continued in earnest, driven by the high prices for gold. In May 1886 Commissioner Glover reported that the goldfield was 'destined to become the premier gold-field of Tasmania, and the great impediment to the fulfilment of that destiny is the want of even the most moderate facilities of access in the way of tracks.'<sup>132</sup> The living conditions in the area were extremely onerous, with many miners choosing to visit only in the summer months. Provisions were expensive and 'once a fortnight every prospector had to take to the track or pay a professional packer £1 to carry a fifty or sixty pound load of bacon, flour and dried oatmeal from the coast.'<sup>133</sup> Working in the harsh conditions took its toll on many men. Thureau noted 'these prospectors think nothing of carrying from 60 to 80 lbs. each of provisions through impenetrable scrub, across deep rivers, flooded morasses, along positively dangerous sidlings; and strong looking men have succumbed after but a year's or so packing, and are but the wreck of what they were before, fit for but very light work.'<sup>134</sup>

Solutions to the transport problems were not easily found. Glover believed government should take an active role to improve communication and transport to the isolated area. His assessment of the situation was accurate. The difficult terrain, harsh climate and impenetrable vegetation could not be conquered overnight, no matter how much money was thrown at the problem. Overcoming the dilemma demanded initiative, innovation and sheer hard work. It was unrealistic to expect development to precede the building of suitable pack-horse tracks to the King and Linda Rivers. Glover

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<sup>131</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines, for 1889-90, 1890, paper 64, p. 26.

<sup>132</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1885, 1886, paper 71, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 29.

considered that the area held great promise but was 'impeded by natural obstacles, the removal of which must involve a very considerable lapse of time, even if the necessary pecuniary means were at once available.'<sup>135</sup>

At the time the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield extended along a twenty mile line from Mount Sorell in the south to Mount Lyell in the north. Operations about the area were fragmented. To the south of the King River alluvial gold had been discovered in the foothills of Mounts Sorell, Darwin and Jukes, and at Flannigan's Creek,<sup>136</sup> where the gravel bed deposits had yielded two men 53 ounces in nine days.<sup>137</sup> Despite promising finds, the area failed to reach expectations. Sporadic mining occurred about the district over a twenty year span (1885 – 1905). The only significant underground gold mine in the area was at Harris's Reward, near the junction of Newell Creek and the King River. A three-head stamper battery, driven by a pelton waterwheel, was erected on site in 1895 to treat the ore mined from the quartz reef. It operated for only a short time before the gold petered out. The venture closed soon after.<sup>138</sup>

Approximately four miles to the north of Harris's Reward and two miles to the east of the Queen River were the Lynch's Creek diggings, discovered in 1881 by Tom Currie. The King River Prospecting and Gold Mining Association had the largest operation, having in 1887 erected an eight stamp battery, driven by a waterwheel. As previously described, the Company fared poorly. The battery proved to be a total waste of money and stood 'as a reminder down the years of the misplaced optimism of company directors and of the enormous odds against success which faced every venture in the region.'<sup>139</sup>

The third distinct area of activity was that located in and about the Queen River Valley. Comprising heavily vegetated and broken country, the going proved to be most arduous, particularly for those undertaking the "gully-raking" activities. Further contributing to the prospector's problems was the time and effort lost in keeping

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<sup>134</sup> JPPP, *The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits* – Report by G Thureau, 1886, paper 146, p. 7.

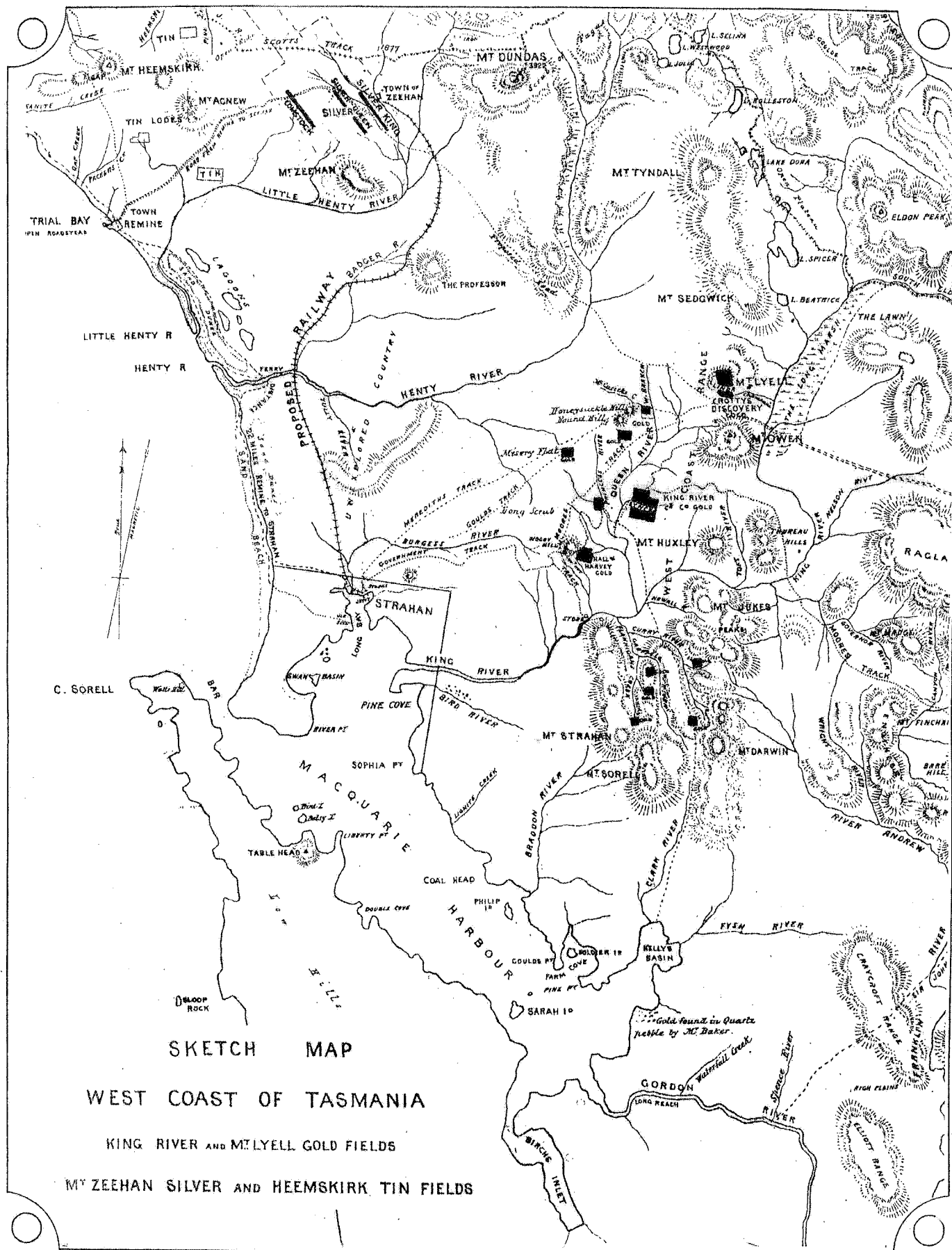
<sup>135</sup> JPPP, *King River and Mount Lyell Gold Fields*; Report by Mr. Commissioner Glover, 1885, paper 129, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> The spelling of this creek name attracted several other variations including Flanigan's and Flanagan's, for the purpose of this thesis the spelling adopted is that shown on the 1889 map for the area.

<sup>137</sup> JPPP, *The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits* – Report by G Thureau, 1886, paper 146, p. 7.

<sup>138</sup> H Julen, *Goldmining on the Tasmanian West Coast*, Launceston, Regal Publications, 1981, p. 33.

<sup>139</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, p. 74.



MAP 8 - KING RIVER AND MOUNT LYELL GOLDFIELDS 1889

themselves supplied with provisions in such an inaccessible place.<sup>140</sup> Despite these many obstacles, some prospectors were rewarded for their efforts. During 1885-86 three parties won 480 ounces of gold from the Queen River area out of a total yield of 2,000 ounces recovered from the goldfield that year.<sup>141</sup> Encouraging deposits of alluvial and reef gold were discovered in the Lynchford area, near the confluence of the Queen and Princess Rivers. The longevity of the mines was generally little more than a few years. At its peak, three companies worked the quartz reefs in the area. The Princess River Company was the largest, having erected a ten stamp water-powered battery in 1888. The Company proved successful for a short time, obtaining 3,000 ounces of gold and paying several dividends to its shareholders.<sup>142</sup>

Several other goldmining ventures, including the Howard's Plains diggings, were scattered in the western hills overlooking the Queen River Valley. Prospected actively from 1883, the shows produced both alluvial and quartz reef gold sporadically for over a decade, the major operator being the Madam Howard Mine. To the south west of Howard's Plains was the Macquarie Mine, located on the government track, midway between Strahan and Mount Lyell. Not far away was the Woody Hill Mine, sited in the hills above Lynchford. Both of these leases were marked off in November 1888, the proprietors of the Macquarie having ambitiously purchased a ten-head battery. This outlay was totally wasted as no payable ore was mined.<sup>143</sup> The Woody Hill Mine was initially developed around 1893, with large sums of money spent on extensive underground workings. It was mined intermittently over a period of twelve years. Like nearly every other mine on the Goldfield, it was unprofitable.<sup>144</sup>

The most extensive gold prospecting area on the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield was that located in the Linda Valley, on the southern slopes of Mount Lyell. Discovered towards the end of 1883 by Steve Karlson and brothers Bill and Michael McDonough, the Iron Blow and associated alluvial gold diggings scattered about the Linda Valley below were the most isolated on the field. The area was difficult to access and was the furthest from the main supply depot at Strahan. The trek from Strahan involved an arduous haul over Meredith's track to Lynch's Creek, then by a very poorly constructed path over the exposed spurs of Mount Owen to Karlson's Gap, the name

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<sup>140</sup> JPPP, King River and Mount Lyell Gold Fields: Report by Mr Commissioner Glover, 1885, paper 129, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> JPPP, The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits – Report by G Thureau, 1886, paper 146, p. 7.

<sup>142</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*, p. 119.

<sup>143</sup> JPPP, District Surveyors: Reports for 1888, 1889, paper 61, p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Julen, *Goldmining on the Tasmanian West Coast*, pp. 32-33

temporarily given to the ridge located between Mounts Lyell and Owen.<sup>145</sup> Some 140 claims were initially pegged around the Iron Blow and about the surrounding valleys and creeks that flowed into the Linda River. The gold was of a very fine character and was not water-worn, giving rise to the theory that it formed part of a decomposed surface formation of a rich mineral lode that lay just beneath the surface. Early tests on the Iron Blow outcrop supported this theory and gave rise to speculation that large quantities of gold-bearing ores could be systematically mined and then processed for the gold content.<sup>146</sup>

### **Gold Mining at Mount Lyell**

The early days at Mount Lyell proved most frustrating for the McDonoughs and Karlson. The surface gold deposits at the Iron Blow had been easy to work but the underground ore had proved much more difficult and very expensive to extract. Even with capital backing, full scale mining was not an option as it was not possible to transport the heavy processing equipment from Strahan. Without a steady income or other financial support, survival on the field was extremely difficult. The three partners soon incurred large bills. The expenses for food and mining provisions, combined with the high packing charges, compounded the difficulties and tensions of living within an isolated and inhospitable environment. Gregory considered the 'troubles now began, as a consequence of the lack of that cohesion, which is essential to the success of mateship. Mutual distrust appeared to stifle the spirit of reasonableness that had hitherto prevailed.'<sup>147</sup>

Winning the fine specks of gold by the conventional methods of panning and sluicing the gravel proved to be hard work for the three men, particularly when water shortages slowed operations to a standstill. Within two years of discovering the Iron Blow, both the McDonoughs had sold up their shares to Strahan storekeeper and gold-buyer Frederick Ormiston Henry, provisions packer William Dixon and Irish born gold digger, James Crotty. Through their greater mining experience, Dixon and Crotty were able to provide the necessary innovation to advance the mining activities at the Iron Blow. The two men were credited by Glover as 'the first party on the West Coast who

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<sup>145</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, p. 75.

<sup>146</sup> JPPP, *The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits*, 1886, paper 146, p. 4.

<sup>147</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, p. 15.

have advanced from the rude “diggers” appliances by using improved methods of gold-saving by blankets and mercury.’<sup>148</sup>

Innovative mining techniques, solid financial backing and business acumen were required to survive the vagaries of the Mount Lyell mining field. During 1885, in an attempt to secure further capital to pay for the expensive mining exploration at the Iron Blow, its owners formed the Mount Lyell Prospecting Association. Comprising twenty shares in all, FO Henry extended his interest in the venture to five shares, Dixon and Crotty held three each, while Steve Karlson and his two brothers, Peter and Karl, each had three shares. Having a majority interest in the Mine, the newer partners, Henry, Dixon and Crotty, were able to control the business dealings and mining activities at the Iron Blow.<sup>149</sup>

Despite restructuring the ownership, the mine remained unproductive, resulting in the shareholders all being required to contribute funds. The cash-strapped Karlson brothers had difficulty in meeting the payments. Through the cunning of Henry, Crotty, Dixon and the mine manager, Tom Strong, the three brothers were forced to sell their shares between April and June 1886.<sup>150</sup> The isolated nature of the mine and the ease of concealing discoveries had made the ruse far easier. The newly-emerging field did not have any resident mining experts or legal representatives, any of whom could have provided the necessary expert advice to the Karlsons. The full injustice of the situation was not fully revealed until a Supreme Court Case in 1896 in which two of the partners, Dixon and Henry, contested the ownership of the shares purchased from Steve Karlson.<sup>151</sup>

The announcement of the gold discoveries at the Iron Blow in the winter of 1886 rejuvenated interest in the Linda Valley. Within months the new sluicing operations in the gullies and creeks had won 400 to 500 ounces of gold. Mining activities at the Iron Blow continued to prove fruitful for the new owners. On viewing the surface operations at the Linda Valley, Thureau reported that the ore deposits did not resemble any lodes, reefs or even dyke formations with which he was familiar. He was equally unsure of the ore beneath the Iron Blow, observing the gold-bearing minerals to be ‘quite unique in their respective characters, and in which gold has not hitherto been found in Tasmania.’<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> JPPP, The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines, 1885, paper 58, p. 10.

<sup>149</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>150</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>151</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 38-41.

<sup>152</sup> JPPP, The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits, 1886, paper 146, p. 5.

Thureau considered that the minerals found at the Iron Blow required considerable study. He confidently predicted the gold deposits would descend to very great depths and would be practically inexhaustible. Guided by the huge iron boulders that capped the original workings, Thureau had mistakenly identified the mauve-coloured gold-bearing rock and the other surrounding ores to be predominantly iron-based combinations. However, vital clues as to the nature of the strange ores and the vast mineral riches to be found beneath the surface readily existed. Surface deposits of pure native copper could be found just nine chains distant from the Iron Blow. Thureau had observed these copper outcrops but did not link its presence to the Iron Blow ores, stating the nearby pure native copper would be 'well worth attention when it can be transported to Long Bay [Strahan] at cheaper rates than at present.'<sup>153</sup>

Despite Thureau's optimistic predictions for the Linda Valley, gold mining activities quickly waned. The limited amounts of easily won alluvial gold had been either worked out or severely hampered by the lack of permanent water needed for the ongoing sluicing operations. At the Iron Blow, the owners had been unable to extract the gold from the mined ore without the assistance of expensive ore-crushing machinery. With no permanent road to the area, importing the heavy items of equipment was not an option for the owners. Having little alternative but to raise further capital, the principal shareholders in the Mount Lyell Prospecting Association agreed to dissolve the Association. In early 1888 they formed The Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company, No Liability. The number of shares in the new Company totalled 18,000, of which Crotty, Dixon and FO Henry fell just short of a controlling interest with 8,970 of the ten shilling shares.<sup>154</sup>

Not only was the Linda Valley isolated in a physical sense, it was also isolated in terms of knowledge. The principals of the Iron Blow, inexperienced in world-wide ore processing techniques, considered the traditional crushing and refinement process of the ore would be sufficient to extract the gold. Refusing to heed expert advice from Thureau, and Sydney based geologist, Dr JR Robertson, the newly-formed Company spent a large sum of money to purchase and transport an eight-head stamper and boiler to the Iron Blow mine. The herculean efforts taken in sledging and dragging the heavy stamp and boiler over the rough track to the site were largely wasted when the equipment failed to recover the fine traces of gold. The reasons for the failure were apparent to Alexander Montgomery, the Inspector of Mines and Geological Surveyor.

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<sup>153</sup> JPPP, *The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits*, 1886, paper 146, p. 6.

<sup>154</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 February 1888, pp. 293-294.



His report on the activities at the Iron Blow was far from complimentary. Montgomery considered the battery to be most inappropriate for the class of ore being treated and suspected that a significant quantity of gold was being lost through the lack of systematic sampling procedures. He noted 'the whole battery was sadly defective...the same remark, I am sorry to say, would apply more or less to everything about the mine.'<sup>155</sup>

Montgomery noted the difficulties that lay ahead in treating the Mount Lyell ore, the inefficiencies of the existing makeshift transport system that serviced the region and the need for a greater population to develop the area's resources. Overall, he believed the colony lacked qualified mine managers with the experience to oversee the implementation of mining and treatment procedures. Commenting on the general mining ills that prevailed on the West Coast at the time, Montgomery considered the very isolated nature of the region had contributed to many poor and expeditious decisions. Offered few choices, and suffering from considerable manufacturing and transport delays, the managers adopted a short sighted, trial and error and quick fix mentality. Simplistic methods often failed where the treatment of complex ores was involved. Failure led to bankruptcies and greatly shattered the confidence of shareholders and potential investors alike. Montgomery's advice to the owners of the Iron Blow mine was simple. They should 'take the precaution of having parcels of from one to five tons treated by various processes before finally deciding on the method of treatment and erecting machinery. The cost of such experimental trials would be nothing compared with the loss that would result from a wrong selection.'<sup>156</sup>

Montgomery's wise counsel had come too late for the shareholders of the cash-strapped mine, a succession of calls on the shares having failed to clear the outstanding debts. At an Extraordinary Meeting of shareholders held in Launceston on 30 July 1891, the decision was taken to voluntarily wind up the affairs of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company, No Liability, in accordance with terms of the *Mining Companies Act 1884*.<sup>157</sup>

The reasons for the Company's downfall were many. Montgomery's report was scathing on all activities. In a second report three years later Montgomery expressed little surprise that not only had gold been lost in the tailings dam, but the battery had failed to recover the high yields of silver, which amounted to as much as thirty ounces

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<sup>155</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1889-90, 1890, paper 64, p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1889-90, 1890, paper 64, p. 13.

<sup>157</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 14 February 1891, p. 1328.

to the ton.<sup>158</sup> *The Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, the first locally produced newspaper within the Western Mining District, upon examining the issues, claimed the nature of the ore body had not been properly ascertained in a judicious manner. Reiterating Montgomery's earlier comments, the *Herald* considered the rash decisions behind the choice of machinery and the processing methodology had been made by an ill-informed Company that was desperate to show a quick return on its investment. The newspaper also condemned the consultants who analysed the ore samples as they had focused purely on the gold content and had completely overlooked the commercial quantities of silver, copper and lead.<sup>159</sup>

Despite high expectations, the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield amounted to little in the context of significant goldfields elsewhere in Tasmania. During the period 1883 to 1893 it produced only average results. Employing sometimes over 300 men a year, the Goldfield reached a maximum production of 6,926 ounces in 1892, or 16.34 per cent of the Island's total gold output. Only twice during the four year period, 1887 to 1890, did the total gold outputs for the West Coast exceed more than 10 per cent of Tasmania's officially stated gold production.<sup>160</sup> There are, however, some doubts as to whether the returns from the West Coast were accurate. The isolated nature of the West Coast goldfields made the collation of figures difficult. From early times the government believed the true value of the gold won from the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield to have been considerably understated. Prone to habitual secrecy, the prospectors did not readily report their finds or the location of their diggings. Over the life of the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield, many mainland and itinerant workers were lured to its rivers and valleys, in search of quick rewards. Much of the gold was taken back home to be sold, without ever being declared and without Tasmania obtaining credit for the mineral wealth it produced. The West Coast had been 'subjected to summer raids of small parties of diggers from the other colonies.'<sup>161</sup>

### **Copper – A New Direction for Mount Lyell?**

When Thureau first reported deposits of pure native copper in the vicinity of the Iron Blow in 1886, he could be easily forgiven for not becoming enthused about the find. At the time no commercial deposits of copper had been mined in Tasmania. The

<sup>158</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3, including a Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, 1893, paper 50, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 February 1892.

<sup>160</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania, years 1883-1893, No. 1 of 1884, No. 1 of 1885, No. 1 of 1886, No. 2 of 1887, No. 2 of 1888, No. 103 of 1889, No. 151 of 1890, No. 150 of 1891, No. 124 of 1892, No. 107 of 1893 and No. 89 of 1894.

first copper leases in the Island had been issued in 1882, with Mines Department records showing the first active mining having occurred in 1888, near Westbury, in Northern Tasmania. During the period 1888-1890 the copper ore production figures for the Island totalled a mere one hundred and fifty five tons.<sup>162</sup>

Elsewhere in Australia, copper producers had experienced a checkered history. The first deposits had been commercially mined in 1842 at Kapunda and 1845 at Burra, north of Adelaide. By the late 1840's the Burra mine had transformed South Australia. Larger copper mines were subsequently developed in 1851 at Wallaroo and Moonta, to the north west of Adelaide. Large copper smelters were eventually erected at Wallaroo in the early 1860's, saving considerable expense of shipping ore to Wales for processing. The Wallaroo plant used large quantities of Newcastle coal to fuel its furnaces, placing a heavy reliance on shipping and low cost fuels.<sup>163</sup> In Cloncurry, Northern Queensland, copper processing was not successful. In 1885 the Cloncurry Copper Mining and Smelting Company had invested heavily in developing the mine and building smelters. The operation had collapsed within two years due to poor management, inefficient smelting technologies and exorbitant transport costs in landing the copper ingots on the London markets.<sup>164</sup>

Copper mining presented considerable difficulties to its Lyell owners. Unlike gold, which was recovered in small amounts, the untreated copper ore could not be economically transported over the poor tracks and sled roads that linked Mount Lyell and Strahan. Thureau's 1886 report earmarked the transport difficulties and high cartage rates as retarding the economic development of a copper industry at Mount Lyell. As gold returns began to fall, greater interest was shown in the extensive copper deposit. Francis Belstead, Secretary of Mines, reported that during the 1888-89 year the copper lode was being energetically opened up and 'under great difficulties, some 30 tons have been packed to a port of shipment [Strahan] and forwarded to New South Wales for treatment.'<sup>165</sup>

The early samples of the native copper had proved encouraging but the high costs of mining, transport and processing made its recovery uneconomic. Coming into 1892, all work at Mount Lyell had been practically discontinued, the Mount Lyell Company doing mine maintenance only. The liquidation of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company in the winter of 1891 had coincided with the general downturn in mining

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<sup>161</sup> JPPP, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, 1885, paper 56, p. 6.

<sup>162</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1891, paper 150, p. 305.

<sup>163</sup> Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, pp. 105-127.

<sup>164</sup> G Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1962, pp. 24-27.

fortunes in the district. Yet, while the Lyell area suffered, the nearby silver mines of Zeehan prospered. The government had let the tender for the construction of a railway to link Strahan with Zeehan. A second line, privately financed, was in the process of being built between Dundas and Zeehan. The promise of a reliable transport system to service the Zeehan area had fuelled a boom in mineral exploration, with some 87,000 acres of ground being taken up for mining purposes. The population of Zeehan had grown to 2,500 and the newly emerging settlement boasted a number of significant buildings. The buoyant nature of the field caused Belstead to comment in his July 1891 report: 'at no previous period in the history of the Colony has the mining industry presented a more hopeful aspect than at present.'<sup>166</sup>

The success of the Zeehan and Dundas silver-fields would prove instrumental in attracting interest to the ailing fortunes of the Mount Lyell operations. Bowes Kelly, a wealthy mining speculator and director of the Broken Hill Proprietary Mine, accompanied by William Orr, had been attracted to Zeehan in 1888 to view the emerging silver field. His initial investments did not amount to much. Returning to Zeehan in January 1891, he received news of the large mineral deposits at Mount Lyell.<sup>167</sup> Because of the difficulties of travel between Zeehan and Mount Lyell, Kelly did not venture to the isolated field. Instead he sent Otto Schlapp, a professional assayer and nephew of Herman Schlapp, the Chief Metallurgist at the Broken Hill Proprietary Mine, to inspect the Mount Lyell Mine. Schlapp was impressed with the results, and advised Kelly accordingly. In the final week of August 1891, Kelly and Orr arrived in Strahan. Here they were met by James Crotty, a shareholder in the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company. The three men subsequently ventured to Mount Lyell where, over a period of several days, the mine was fully inspected and ore samples bagged and sent to Broken Hill for examination.<sup>168</sup>

Kelly and his Broken Hill cohorts proved shrewd businessmen. Happy with the extent and grade of the copper lode, they negotiated the purchase of the controlling interest at a mere £5,000, well below the £18,750 asking price. The Company was immediately restructured. Incorporated in Victoria in January 1892, the new owners of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company, No Liability, set about refurbishing the mine workings and driving new exploration tunnels. Within six months of taking over the mine, the newly-appointed Mine Manager, Otto Schlapp, ambitiously reported

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<sup>165</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1888-89, 1889, paper 81, p. 4.

<sup>166</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1890-91, 1891, paper 129, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 March 1897.

<sup>168</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 35-41.

5,000,000 tons of copper ore in sight. If this figure proved correct, then the mine would be more profitable than the Wallaroo and Moonta mines, the largest in Australia.<sup>169</sup>

The close links forged between the new Mount Lyell and the Broken Hill Proprietary Companies, through having common directors, would prove of considerable benefit to the fledgling Company. The Broken Hill men were able to assist with valuable advice and assistance concerning general mining operations and, through their established contacts, could provide a ready access to international mining experts. As the Mount Lyell ore differed to that of any other copper ore-bodies in Australia, the Company sought the expertise of an overseas metallurgist with copper refinery construction experience. In November 1892 Dr Edward Dyer Peters, an eminent American metallurgist, assayer and mineralogist, was employed to undertake the task at the substantial sum of £2,500, an amount later considered cheap given his report.<sup>170</sup> Peters would prove well suited to the task. He was well acquainted with copper processing techniques, having worked in a number of mines, concentrating mills and smelting works. He had also designed, built and managed smelting and concentrating works, and had written an industry accepted book titled *Modern American Methods of Copper Smelting*.<sup>171</sup> Chapter 2 deals with the mining and processing developments at Mount Lyell, the battle to control the copper mines and the detrimental effects of the Mount Lyell Company's operations on the environment.

### **Marine Transport – Sailing into Difficulties**

The evolution of a reliable means of transport, both to and within the Western Mining District, had been slow and laborious. Elsewhere in the Colonies water, road and rail transport had developed, but not on the West Coast. The shallow entry into Macquarie Harbour had prevented safe access for large ships. The development of roads and tracks had suffered through inappropriate design and construction methods. Rail transport could not proceed until the economic viability of the isolated mining fields had been fully proven. The following sections outline the difficulties, frustrations and limited successes of shipping, track and road and railway transport systems employed in the region.

Improved mining activity in the Western Mining District during 1881 led to a corresponding increase in shipping movements along the coastline. The high frequency of the heavy westerly gales and the lack of safe shelter were of concern to the crews and

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<sup>169</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 59.

<sup>170</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

passengers visiting the region. In August 1881 Premier William Giblin requested Governor Lefroy to approach the Lords of the Admiralty to undertake a marine survey of the West Coast, seeking accurately to define the harbours and anchorages. Existing maps were well out of date, having been prepared in 1798 by Matthew Flinders. Lefroy's request met with a negative response. The Admiralty was not prepared to perform the task, advising it had been spurned twice previously, in 1860 and in 1878, and was not happy with the treatment it had received from the Tasmanian government. Admiralty advised Giblin that future priority would be given to mapping the eastern seaboard where there was a greater need for detailed surveys.<sup>172</sup>

Apart from seeking marine surveys, the government undertook a number of reports and studies concerning the region the same year. On 9 August 1881, Parliament dealt with a petition from 307 Hobart and Launceston inhabitants seeking a subsidy to introduce a regular steamboat communication between the West Coast and Hobart and Launceston.<sup>173</sup> Responding to the petition, Parliament appointed a Select Committee on 11 August 1881 to investigate three issues. The first dealt with the agricultural and mineral resources of the Western District, the second required an assessment of the facilities needed to improve land and water access to the region, and the third looked at the practicability and cost of building tramways.<sup>174</sup> Not only was the lack of transport of concern to prospective mining companies, but also the method by which goods and resources could be moved about the difficult terrain between isolated districts. Recognising the need for an effective transport system Inspector of Mines, Gustav Thureau, reported:

And this is really the point at issue; because if this (Cumberland Tin Mining Company) and other West Coast mining companies can secure rapid delivery of the ores they are evidently capable to produce for shipping via Hobart or via other colonial ports, the future of this at present so dreary and altogether unproductive region will be very considerably improveupon (sic), and the prosperity of that coast be proportionately enhanced.<sup>175</sup>

The Select Committee wasted little time. Between 16 and 18 August it called and examined a cross-section of interested parties. Opinion was sought concerning the preference for the regional port between Macquarie Harbour, Trial Inlet<sup>176</sup> and the Pieman River. In nearly all instances Macquarie Harbour was the favoured option as it

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<sup>171</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 January 1893.

<sup>172</sup> HAJ, Marine Survey of the Coast of Tasmania: Correspondence, 1884, paper 40, pp. 8-10.

<sup>173</sup> HAJ, Steam Communication with West Coast: Petition, 1881, paper 87.

<sup>174</sup> HAJ, Votes and Proceedings, Tuesday 9 August 1881, appointment of Select Committee, p. 44.

<sup>175</sup> LCJ, West Coast: Progress Reports on Mines by Mr G Thureau, FGS, 1881, paper 77, p. 10.

could accommodate vessels of at least 200 tons and offered unlimited safe anchorage points within the harbour. Several of the experienced mariners recommended that small steam launches of 15 to 20 tons be used to supply provisions between Macquarie Harbour and the small anchorage site at Trial Inlet. Due to the generally flat coastal terrain between Heemskirk and Macquarie Harbour, most of those questioned considered that it would be practical to construct either a tramway or a macadamised road over the twenty miles of intervening land.<sup>177</sup>

Reporting to Parliament on 19 August, the Select Committee recommended that two beacons, a jetty with jib-crane and a Customs receiving house be erected at Macquarie Harbour. For Trial Inlet, it was resolved that moorings would be laid down and a jetty and jib-crane built. A macadamised road was to be constructed between the Trial Inlet and South Heemskirk, a distance of three miles.<sup>178</sup> Charles Sprent, a long-term advocate of Macquarie Harbour as the preferred port, provided positive advice on its practical suitability for shipping purposes. The channels were predictable and there had been little change in their position and depth for over forty years. Sprent recommended that buoys and markers should be placed to assist mariners in the short-term. At times of irregular tides, particularly when the feeder rivers were in flood, Sprent suggested that a semaphore be erected at Pilot's Bay, to signal the depth of water to approaching vessels. He considered that, for small steamers, 'the matter was not of much importance; but to sailing vessels the great tide-rush and the narrow entrance are great troubles, unless there is a fair strong breeze'.<sup>179</sup>

Sprent had favoured Smith Cove, at the head of Swan Basin, as the best location for the settlement in Macquarie Harbour. It was centrally located and could be linked with roads from Hamilton, Mount Bischoff and the Huon region. Building timber and road gravel were readily available. Materials to build a jetty and houses could be recovered from the old convict ruins at Sarah Island. Sprent believed that Smith Cove would be the future shipping port for Mount Heemskirk and the surrounding country and 'no matter what is done at Trial Harbour the trade will eventually come to Macquarie'.<sup>180</sup>

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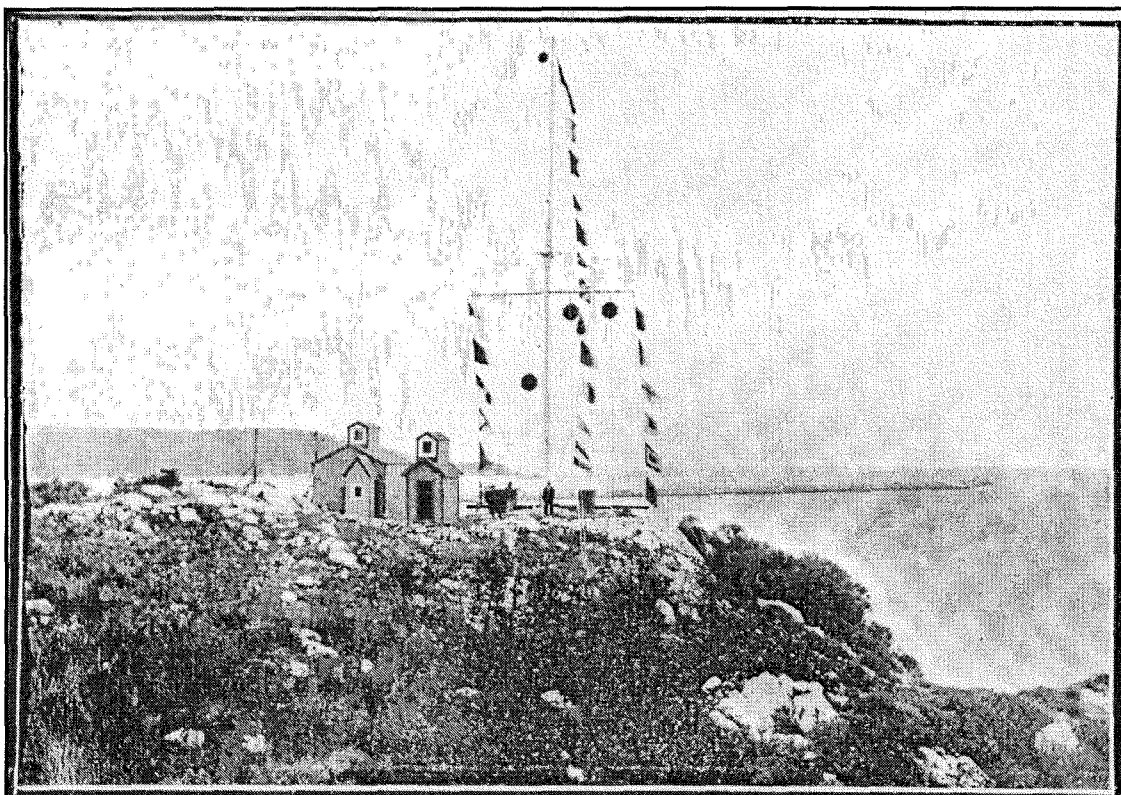
<sup>176</sup> Trial Inlet was to become later known as Trial Harbour. It was located approximately midway between Macquarie Harbour (south) and the Pieman River (north).

<sup>177</sup> HAJ, Mineral Resources, West Coast: Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, and Evidence, 1881, paper 91, pp. 5-8.

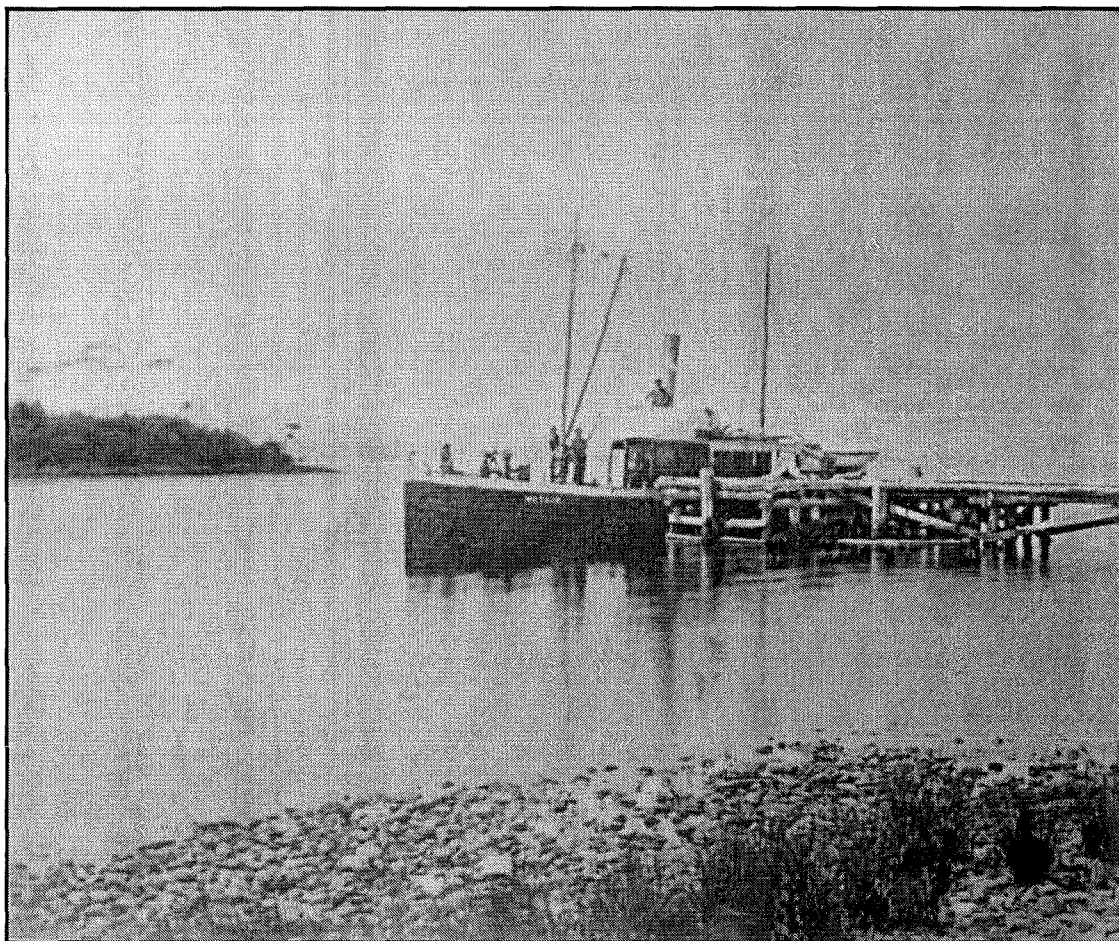
<sup>178</sup> HAJ, Mineral Resources, West Coast: Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, and Evidence, 1881, paper 91, p. 4.

<sup>179</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour and Trial Boat Harbour: Reports by Mr CP Sprent, 1881, paper 121, p. 3.

<sup>180</sup> HAJ, Macquarie Harbour and Trial Boat Harbour: Reports by Mr CP Sprent, 1881, paper 121, p. 4.



SIGNAL STATION AND BREAKWATER – MACQUARIE HEADS, c. 1910



SS METEOR AT SMITH COVE JETTY



The government accepted its role to underpin and facilitate transport infrastructure requirements, but it considered internal communications should be funded in part by public enterprise. In response, the West Coast Steamboat and Tramway Company sought Parliament's approval to build a railway between Mount Heemskirk and Macquarie Harbour. It also undertook to operate a regular steamboat and subsidised mail service between the West Coast and Hobart. In return, the company sought a number of concessions. It required land grants at both terminuses and up to one thousand acres along the route.<sup>181</sup> Eager to see the proposal advance, the government agreed to several of the company's demands and prepared a draft Bill.<sup>182</sup> Unfortunately, the proponent's hopes were not supported by sufficient capital to fund the works. After further discussions the matter lapsed and the Bill was withdrawn.<sup>183</sup>

Sub-standard mapping and the government's apparent lack of commitment to spend the necessary money to improve shipping facilities on the West Coast greatly frustrated businesses and mining in the region. Access into Macquarie Harbour was shallow and very dangerous in poor weather. The ongoing movement of the sand near the entry had produced instances where boats had bumped over the bar with the depth of clearance reduced to seven feet six inches of water.<sup>184</sup> Port facilities had been established at Smith Cove during 1882 and buoys and beacons were placed about the harbour to assist navigation. The jetty was of cheap construction, being built under very great difficulties by unskilled labour. All timber had been obtained locally, being 'brought across from the King River by means of a small boat, at great cost, and often with much risk.'<sup>185</sup> Smith Cove was declared a Sub-Port of Macquarie Harbour and an authorised landing-place for goods subject to customs duty, effective on and after 1 February 1882.<sup>186</sup>

In August 1883, at the instigation of storekeeper Frederick Henry, a new settlement was established at Long Bay, a little more than a mile to the north of Smith Cove. Offering deepwater frontage and sheltered moorings, the new port soon expanded. Piers and jetties were erected along the foreshore to handle the growing mining trade, while supplies were also transshipped to the smaller vessels that

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<sup>181</sup> HAJ, Proposed West Coast Steamboat and Tramway Company: Correspondence relating to Terms and Conditions of Concessions to be Granted, 1881, paper 131, pp. 3 & 4.

<sup>182</sup> HAJ, Votes and Proceedings, Wednesday 2 November 1881, West Coast Steam Company, pp. 184-5.

<sup>183</sup> HAJ, Summary of Proceedings on Bills during the Session of 1881, 1881.

<sup>184</sup> HAJ, Strahan to Heemskirk Tramway: Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, 1882, paper 99, p. 5.

<sup>185</sup> HAJ, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, 1882, paper 79, p. 66.

<sup>186</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 10 January 1882, p. 157.

provisioned the coastal settlements at Trial Harbour and the Pieman River.<sup>187</sup> The ongoing developments at Smith Cove and Strahan are discussed later in this chapter.

The influx of prospectors bound for the Heemskirk tinfields and the King River goldfields increased shipping in Macquarie Harbour during 1883. Travel times and sailing certainty were vastly improved by the *ss Wakefield*.<sup>188</sup> Mining prospects within the Western Mining District continued to ebb and flow into the mid-1880's, which reduced the government's resolve to inject large sums of money into the region. In 1887 the mining fortunes for the area improved, sparked by the resurgence of interest in the Zeehan District. The discovery of a rich silver lode by George Bell and Sam Jackson at the Silver Queen property, combined with the ongoing excitement created by silver discoveries at the Broken Hill mines, had given a renewed impetus to silver mining in Tasmania.<sup>189</sup> Strahan, as the major port for the region, stood to prosper by the investment in the Zeehan area. Industrial expansion was also a possibility with Gustav Thureau contending that Strahan would be the likely site to smelt the Zeehan silver ores.<sup>190</sup>

With the silver ore-bodies at Zeehan proven, the government agreed to call tenders to build a railway to link the silver mines with Strahan. Construction works on the twenty-eight and a half mile line commenced 24 November 1889, substantially increasing port activity. Regular ships calling at the port included the *ss Koonya*, *Pioneer* and *Bowra* from Hobart and the *ss Devon* from Launceston. Two smaller steamers, *Meteor* and *Minx*, operated the coastal run between Strahan and Trial Harbour.<sup>191</sup> Apart from railway construction equipment, much building material and mining equipment was also being imported for the rapidly expanding townships and mines about the Zeehan and Dundas areas. The government faced mounting pressure to improve the entrance into the harbour as vessels were restricted to 200 tons register. This limitation would not cater for a developing mineral field where large tonnages of ore and concentrates would be exported and volumes of coke and coal imported.<sup>192</sup>

In seeking to redress the harbour access problems, the government commissioned the experienced New Zealand engineer, C Napier Bell. In his April 1890 examination,

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<sup>187</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>188</sup> HAJ, *West Coast: Report of Engineer of Roads upon all the works executed under Overseer Clay's superintendence*, 1883, paper 127, pp. 3-4.

<sup>189</sup> W Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, Zeehan, Evershed Brothers, 1891, pp. 14-15.

<sup>190</sup> JPPP, *Mount Zeehan Silver and Argentiiferous Lead Lodes and Other Ore Deposits: Report by Mr G Thureau*, 1888, paper 144, p. 7.

<sup>191</sup> Walch's *Tasmanian Almanac* for 1890, *Steam Communication*, p. 344.

<sup>192</sup> JPPP, *The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices*, 1891, paper 116, p. 17.

Bell observed that tidal flows in the harbour were affected by strong winds that, in the shallow channels, could mask the effects of the tides. He also noted that when the floodwaters flowing from the rivers into the harbour were met by strong westerly gales, it caused the levels to rise three feet six inches at Strahan. Further adding to the overall problem was the dumping of sand by the wave action across the seaward entrance to the harbour. Some of this sand was swept inside the heads, forming shoals within the harbour.<sup>193</sup>

Bell's solution was to erect breakwaters either side of the entrance to the harbour. The stone walls would redirect the sand away from the channel and allow the strong currents inside to scour away the sandy bars either side of the narrow entrance. The need for inner training walls, designed to direct water flows, was also identified. Bell estimated the total construction costs for both breakwaters and ancillary works to be £149,236 or, as a short-term measure, £88,350 for the eastern breakwater and training wall. These amounts included an allowance to erect a temporary railway bridge over the entrance channel, to bring the stone from the quarry across to the eastern breakwater works. The proposed timber bridge would require a span of eighty feet. Bell considered an accurate survey should be undertaken of the harbour entry as the old 1820 Admiralty chart was unreliable. He further recommended dredging works inside the harbour to establish a new and deeper channel over the sandy shoal and the planting of binding grass to secure the sand on the point.<sup>194</sup>

Bell's report confirmed the works required would be expensive. The government was not prepared to spend such money and left matters in abeyance. The situation became more urgent as the pending completion of the railway through to Zeehan threatened to escalate cargo through Strahan. Bigger boats would be required to carry the large volumes of ore and bullion at competitive rates to the mainland ports. The problem appeared to have been resolved midway through 1891 when Hobart civil engineer, Arthur William Lawder, approached the government with a plan to construct breakwaters, tidal walls, lighthouses, buoys, wharves, tramways and other ancillary works. He had studied Napier Bell's report and considered it to be deficient. The length of Bell's proposed breakwaters was too short to achieve the necessary channel scouring effect. Lawder estimated his project would cost £244,387. This sum would be recouped by charging an average toll of 3*s*.4*d*. on freight moved over the wharf. He envisaged the existing limit on boats in the harbour could be raised to 1,500 tons,

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<sup>193</sup> JPPP, Entrance to Macquarie Harbour: Report by C Napier Bell, 1890, paper 61, pp. 3-5.

improving safety and reducing costs. Lawder intended to finance the scheme by raising capital in London. The project was readily supported by Tasmanian 'Ship-owners, Coal Field Proprietors, and persons largely interested in promoting trade in the West Coast of Tasmania.'<sup>195</sup>

Lawder was versed in dealing with politicians and had been involved three years earlier in an attempt to build a railway from Strahan to Mount Zeehan.<sup>196</sup> His proposal came at a most convenient time, given the expected development of the mines in the Zeehan and Dundas areas that had been sparked by the construction of the railway to Zeehan and a second privately built line between Dundas and Zeehan. Supporters of Lawder's scheme argued that its acceptance would create new industries and employment opportunities both on the West Coast and elsewhere in Tasmania.<sup>197</sup> Some 359 West Coast residents signed a petition expressing their support for the proposal. They anticipated its implementation would effect 'the opening up of these great mineral fields to the markets of the world.'<sup>198</sup>

While Lawder's opportunistic proposal offered short-term advantages to government, it also had many long-term ramifications. At the ensuing Select Committee hearings, it was noted that great care would have to be taken to ensure an oppressive monopoly would not be created. There was a strong concern that if the harbour was opened up to larger boats, Tasmanian-owned shipping services would be replaced by mainland and overseas operators. The proposal made the proposition for a mainland smelter to treat local ores far more viable. It would favour the importing of Newcastle coal instead of using the locally mined product from Sandfly, Southport and Recherche. With Melbourne 316 miles by sea from Strahan and Hobart 210 miles, the use of bigger vessels might draw all West Coast traffic away from Tasmania.<sup>199</sup>

Despite the various arguments raised, the Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill was recommended by the Select Committee, subject to minor amendments. The Bill was passed in the House of Assembly but was rejected by the Legislative Council.<sup>200</sup> Papers

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<sup>194</sup> JPPP, Entrance to Macquarie Harbour: Report by C Napier Bell, 1890, paper 61, pp. 3-5 and map attachments.

<sup>195</sup> JPPP, The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1891, paper 116, p. 17.

<sup>196</sup> JPPP, Mount Zeehan Tramway: Correspondence and Other Papers, 1888, paper 97, p. 8.

<sup>197</sup> JPPP, The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1891, paper 116, pp. 17 & 18.

<sup>198</sup> JPPP, Lawder Harbour Improvements: Petition from Residents of Zeehan and Strahan, 1891, paper 116A.

<sup>199</sup> JPPP, The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1891, paper 116.

<sup>200</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot Station Conservation Plan*, p. 21.

of the day were mixed in their reaction to the Lawder proposal. Edward Miles,<sup>201</sup> local shipping agent and contractor on the Strahan to Zeehan railway, vehemently opposed the monopolistic scheme.<sup>202</sup> Lawder defended his proposal, pointing out the flaws and bias expressed by Miles.<sup>203</sup> An independent engineer, Montague Rhys Jones, also attacked the veracity of the comments aired by Miles.<sup>204</sup> The local community supported harbour improvements and was cynical of Miles' attempt to block them.<sup>205</sup> Faced with a failed proposal, and an unwillingness to invest the necessary capital to build the breakwaters, the government took the option of least resistance and implemented a program to improve navigation and harbour management. During later 1891, extensions were commenced on the Railway Wharf at Strahan to accommodate the transshipment of goods between rail and boat.<sup>206</sup>

Government procrastination soon came to the fore when the brigantines *Sea Bird*, on 2 December 1891, and *Circe*, on 21 February 1892, were shipwrecked on the seaboard entrance to Macquarie Harbour.<sup>207</sup> Following the wreck of the *Sea Bird*, the government implemented plans to set navigation lights at Macquarie Heads and to construct a pilot station.<sup>208</sup> Despite initial enthusiasm, works were not progressed over the ensuing months. This fact was highlighted by the loss of the *Circe*. The government was forced to move quickly. Serious concerns had been expressed that the access into the harbour was unsafe for large boats under sail. Concern was expressed that they might be prevented from visiting Strahan.<sup>209</sup> As an interim measure, aimed at providing greater administrative autonomy, the government proclaimed the Marine Board of Strahan, effective 28 March 1892. The Board comprised Wardens Alfred Slater, Arthur Pontifex, Frederick Henry, Hugh Clerke, Edward Miles, Thomas Reynolds and James Gaffney, all prominent businessmen or mariners from the West Coast.<sup>210</sup> The inaugural meeting of the Board was held on the 6 April, with Captain Miles elected as the first Master Warden.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Edward Miles was to play a significant role in Strahan shipping activities, with the local Marine Board and as a politician. His involvement in West Coast matters is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>202</sup> *Mercury*, 15 August 1891.

<sup>203</sup> *Mercury*, 18 August 1891.

<sup>204</sup> *Mercury*, 21 August 1891.

<sup>205</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 November 1891.

<sup>206</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 4 August 1891, p. 1469.

<sup>207</sup> Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, pp. 87-92.

<sup>208</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 December 1891.

<sup>209</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 March 1892.

<sup>210</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 29 March 1892, p. 776.

<sup>211</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 26 April 1892, p. 937.

Navigational improvements at the entrance to the harbour included the erection of white lights on both Entrance and Bonnet Islands and a further two green lights placed on high ground overlooking the harbour. The head light keeper's residence was erected on the southern inside entrance to the harbour, while conjoined residences for two families were built on Entrance Island. The new lights were officially placed in operation on 1 June 1892 and afforded night-time access to and from the harbour.<sup>212</sup> A pilot's station and cottage were also built adjacent to the harbour passage and a large signal staff was sited on the Bluff at the south-western side of the entrance. A system of signals was implemented to indicate tidal flow. Flags were hoisted on the arms of the staff to direct port or starboard courses to the ships' captains. On calm days the pilot's boat would meet the ships. The pilot used hand held flag for signalling purposes.<sup>213</sup>

These measures improved safety and navigational procedures, but did nothing to increase the size of the ships entering the harbour. All overseas freight, incoming and outgoing, had to be double handled at other ports in Australia. By the end of 1892 Strahan had developed into a very busy port, with new and extensive wharf amenities. The opening of the railway to Zeehan on 4 February that year considerably increased the volumes of freight handled and the numbers of passengers embarking and disembarking at Strahan. Regular steam ship communication with Strahan included the s.s. *Banks Peninsula*, *Yolla*, *Bowra*, *Bellinger*, *Glenelg* and *Devon* from Hobart, and the s.s. *Herbert*, *Cambria*, *Koonya* and *Wakefield* from Launceston, and a weekly service by TA Reynolds and Co. to Melbourne.<sup>214</sup>

Despite the positive outlook for the mining industry, and growth of port activities at Strahan, its long-term future was far from assured. The restrictions placed on the shipping were likely to promote the extensions of railways from Burnie, Hobart and Launceston, where overseas ships could land and load their cargoes. Conventional methods of improving the navigational systems had worked to a point but it was now time for innovative solutions to improve the entry to Macquarie Harbour. Chapter 3 looks at the process of effecting the harbour improvements, shipping enterprises and the various ports developed about Macquarie Harbour and its estuaries to cater for the mineral traffic.

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<sup>212</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 June 1892.

<sup>213</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 12 July 1892.

## Tracks and Roads – Trial and Error

Walking was the primary mode of travel as few west coasters could afford the high cost of the imported grain and chaff to keep a horse. A number of rough tracks had been hewn through the thick undergrowth and along the muddy button grass plains by the early exploration parties, but very few were suited to upgrading into pack tracks and roads. The roads required easier grades, greater widths, good drainage and a solid base to support heavy traffic. On the West Coast, particularly in wet and boggy areas, “slabbing” had become popular. Lengths of timber were laid across the road and, in some instances, were corded or bound together to provide a relatively solid surface. The use of the corduroy roads had evolved in areas where round logs and slabs were easily procured. In many instances the timber was short lived. The Engineer of Roads, William Duffy, criticised the corduroy roads. Unless they were built on a solid foundation and properly drained, they should not be tolerated under any circumstances. Duffy noted that ‘where slabs have been laid on long timbers or sleeper logs, after the first few years this hollow road is dangerous to life and limb, and the road is worse than useless.’<sup>215</sup>

Alexander Montgomery dammed the standard of the roads built in the Western Mining District. He considered the makeshift character of the roads to be detrimental to the mining industry, observing ‘the difference in first cost of a good and a bad road is soon lost in the extra expense of transit over the latter.’<sup>216</sup> Much of government’s early hesitancy in building all-weather roads stemmed from the high construction costs and the short-term nature of many of the mining fields. The first track to link Strahan and the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield had been that built by George Meredith in early 1883. It was steep in places, poorly built and unsuited for packhorses or heavy traffic. The following year, as discoveries of gold in the area increased, the government approved the construction of a new road between Strahan and Lynch’s Creek. Surveyed by JW Hoyle, it was constructed by day labour and comprised generally easier grades over the twenty-five mile route. A second horse track was then built to link with Howard’s Plains. This track led in a northerly direction from its junction at the fifteen mile on the Lynch’s Creek Road, and kept to the high ground above the Queen River Valley.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Walch’s *Tasmanian Almanac for 1892*, Steam Communication, p. 354.

<sup>215</sup> HAJ, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, 1883, paper 59, p. vii.

<sup>216</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines, for 1889-90: Including Inspector of Mines’ Report, 1890, paper 64, p. 11.

<sup>217</sup> HAJ, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, 1884, paper 58, p. 10.

The road to Lynch's Creek was beset with many problems that stemmed from the Hobart-based administration's lack of understanding. Duffy wrote of a lack of information from the beginning and consequent under-funding. The road traversed heavily-timbered myrtle terrain subject to incessant rain. By necessity, the road was narrow, hemmed in by dense vegetation. When subjected to heavy packhorse traffic, wet sections became a ribbon of mud, which varied in depth from five inches to five feet. Duffy noted that in some instances, where the baueria was met, the peat had been removed from the track, and the packhorses and men had to wade up a narrow ditch filled with black, filthy, fetid mud. The Queen River crossing was over a ford that was subject to frequent flooding. Duffy considered the track to Howard's Plains to be of inferior construction and nearly impassable, owing to the mud and the failure to build on solid ground.<sup>218</sup>

Duffy's report had immediate impact. Parliament allocated £1,500 in the latter half of 1885 to rectify the problems on the packhorse road.<sup>219</sup> Eager to commence processing the gold ore at its Lynch's Creek operation, the King River Prospecting and Gold Mining Association lobbied government to upgrade the road to dray standard, to enable heavy machinery to be hauled in from Strahan. Having already faced severe criticism over its tardiness, the government pledged a further £6,000 to upgrade the road. Labourers were dispatched from Hobart to assist with the temporary road improvements to ensure the loaded drays arrived at their destination without delay. Upon achieving this objective, during December 1886, permanent road improvements were commenced. The opportunity was also taken to upgrade the pack track between Lynch's Creek and the Linda Valley, to assist the increasing numbers of miners attracted to the area following the discovery of gold near the Iron Blow.<sup>220</sup>

The interest generated by the gold discoveries in the Linda Valley led to further pressure being applied to government to improve the western section of Thomas Bather Moore's overland track, between Mount Arrowsmith and Mount Lyell. Cut to a rough standard in 1883, its upgrading was needed both to provide a direct mail communication with Hobart and to enable the movement of stock and provisions from the Midland Districts to the goldfields. Overcoming the mountains and rivers, between the eastern seaboard and the western mineral fields, was a gradual process. Each small gain greatly assisted the breakdown of the barriers that contributed to the isolation of the region. By

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<sup>218</sup> JPPP, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, 1885, paper 56, p. 6.

<sup>219</sup> JPPP, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, (including Report of Engineer of Roads) 1886, paper 66, p. ix.



June 1887 the overland track had been cleared westerly from Mount Arrowsmith to within fifteen miles of the King River. The works featured numerous timber bridges and a wire suspension bridge over the Collingwood River 'strong enough to carry a loaded packhorse across.'<sup>221</sup>

The section of the overland track between Lake St Clair and Mount Arrowsmith was exposed and subject to snow. Once it dropped into the western valleys, flooding was a major problem. The longer bridges traversing the Franklin, Collingwood and King Rivers had been difficult to erect and expensive to maintain. Deputy Surveyor-General, Charles Sprent, endorsed the route chosen from Ouse, via Lake St Clair, to Mount Lyell, as the best possible approach to the Western country. He was impressed with the scenic charms of the area and its potential for tourism, noting the grand views of Mount Gell and Frenchman's Cap as seen from the road descending Mount Arrowsmith. However, Sprent was far less impressed with the difficult and exposed route chosen for the Linda Valley to Lynch's Creek Road, stating 'a great blunder has been made by the diggers who laid out this track, and I recommend that it be abandoned.'<sup>222</sup>

By 1890, of the tracks and roads built on the West Coast, only three were capable of carrying horse drawn carts. These roads included Strahan to Trial Harbour,<sup>223</sup> Trial Harbour to Zeehan and Strahan to Lynch's Creek, all of which suffered to varying degrees with the onset of wet weather. The arrival of the first stage coach in Strahan during November 1890 had drawn much cynicism from the locals, who doubted that it would be able to handle the roads. Drawing much of the local criticism was Thomas Bather B Moore, the District Road Inspector. Moore was a capable and very experienced man, having been involved in track cutting, surveying and mineral exploration on the West Coast for many years. He blamed the government for its penny-pinching activities for the poor roads and claimed that his recommendations were consistently over-ruled and that he was not permitted to exercise his own judgement.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> JPPP, Public Works, Report of the Engineer-in-Chief (including Reports of Engineer of Roads and Architect), 1887, paper 55, p. x.

<sup>221</sup> JPPP, Public Works, Report of the Engineer-in-Chief (including Reports of Engineer of Roads and Architect), 1887, paper 55, p. ix.

<sup>222</sup> JPPP, Ouse to Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour: Report by Deputy-Surveyor General, 1887, paper 58, p. 5.

<sup>223</sup> Trial Harbour was the name given to the location of the anchorage point for the small vessels that supplied the district while the official name given to the town that developed around the port activities was Remine. Both names were often applied to the area, the most common being Trial Harbour, which has been used in this thesis to avoid confusion.

<sup>224</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 November 1890.

Roads were essential in the built-up areas. In the larger towns, road trusts were established to carry out road construction and maintenance. A board of trustees administered the road funds and the accounts were examined annually by the Auditor-General. Money to pay for the works was partly raised from an annual levy on property owners, the balance being contributed by government. Strahan established its road trust in 1890, having an operating budget of £53 15s.3d., of which the government contributed £22 11s.3d.<sup>225</sup> The construction of roads and tracks on the West Coast was a vexatious problem for government. Over the ensuing years it would be forced to spend large amounts of money to open up and then develop the isolated mining areas scattered about the Western Mining District. Chapter 4 covers this topic in detail.

### **Railways – A Desired Outcome**

Australia's first vigorous era of railway expansion spanned the 1870's to the 1890's when, unlike the American experience, commodity prices were falling. Despite the hardships, Australia's infant economy had been able to achieve as much strength and drive as America from its network of railways.<sup>226</sup> The advantages of steam trains were numerous. They were cheaper and more efficient than the horse and bullock teams they replaced. Transporting greater freight loads and numbers of passengers quickly over long distances, the railways offered a year round service to once isolated hinterland areas. Throughout Australia the construction of railways had gone hand in hand with exploration, new settlements, the finding of gold and the opening up of the land.<sup>227</sup> Railways had been shown to have 'a wonderful effect in inducing settlement and creating a traffic which would otherwise be impossible.'<sup>228</sup>

The mining industry had prospered around Australia through the advent of railways. Without the ability to rail the ore and bullion to the ports and to import the large quantities of coke, coal and mining timber needed to supply the smelters, many of Australia's mineral lodes would have been uneconomic to mine. The major gold mines in Western Australia, the copper fields at Cloncurry and Mount Isa, in outback Queensland, the Victorian gold fields of Ballarat and Bendigo and the silver and zinc mines at Broken Hill, in western New South Wales, all flourished through the provision of rail transport. At the end of the nineteenth century 'when mines again briefly

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<sup>225</sup> JPPP, Road Trusts: Assessments and Contributions, 1888-1892, 1893, paper 97.

<sup>226</sup> G Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance, How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd, 2001, pp. 264-265.

<sup>227</sup> P Adam-Smith, *When we Rode the Rails*, Sydney, Lansdowne, 1983, p. 11.

<sup>228</sup> HAJ, Comparison of Cost of Transit by Railways and by Roads, 1883, paper 144, p. 3.

outstripped pastures as Australia's great export earners, much of the wealth was coming from new fields in inaccessible country where railways were vital.'<sup>229</sup>

The early railways in Tasmania had not been successful. Work on the first railway, between the Mersey River and Deloraine, had begun in July 1865 but was abandoned prior to completion.<sup>230</sup> On New Year's Day 1872 the seventeen mile section between Latrobe and Coilers Creek had opened for three and a half months but closed through a lack of traffic.<sup>231</sup> Construction of a second railway, between Launceston and Deloraine, had commenced on 15 January 1868 and was completed on 10 February 1871. From the onset the 5' 3" gauge line was beset with financial problems and in August 1872 it was taken over by the government.<sup>232</sup> Shortly before this date, on 15 March 1872, the contract had been signed by the Tasmanian Main Line Railway Company to build a 3' 6" gauge railway between Hobart and Launceston. Officially opened 1 November 1876, the railway's performance suffered through poor construction practices, cheap and inefficient engines and rolling stock, and numerous accidents and breakdowns. The 133 mile line was eventually purchased by the government on 1 October 1890, providing the new owners with the opportunity to introduce greater efficiencies in the overall operations of the Tasmanian railway network.<sup>233</sup>

For those involved in the early railway construction era in Tasmania, including the 'local pioneers, overseas speculators, railway construction engineers, government leaders and parliamentary representatives – it was more a story of false hopes, financial greed, official stubbornness [sic] and blindness, local prejudice, and stupid north-south rivalry.'<sup>234</sup> The introduction of railways and tramways onto the West Coast was not an easy process. Due to the initial high capital outlay involved, government was unwilling to commit to railway construction before the economic certainty of a mining field had been established. From an early stage of the West Coast's development railways had been viewed as the solution to its transport problems. In 1882 George Innes, a District Surveyor with the Lands Department, considered it would be more practical to build a railway between Macquarie Harbour, via the Derwent Valley, direct to Hobart, rather

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<sup>229</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance, How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, p. 267.

<sup>230</sup> Robson, *A History of Tasmania, Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>231</sup> L Whitham, The Latrobe Wharf Railway, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings (THRA)*, Volume 32, No. 1, March 1985, p. 8.

<sup>232</sup> B Chamberlain, *The Launceston and Western Railway Company Ltd, 1867-1904*, Launceston, Regal Press, undated, pp. 2 & 45.

<sup>233</sup> B Chamberlain, *T.M.L.R – Too Many Loose Rails*, Launceston, B Chamberlain, undated, pp. 2, 26 & 45.

<sup>234</sup> Townsley, *Tasmania From Colony to Statehood 1803 – 1945*, p. 123.

than spending money on the port facilities. Innes viewed railways as a cost efficient method of transport and dismissed the barriers imposed by the intervening mountains as presenting 'no formidable obstacles to engineering progress.'<sup>235</sup>

Railways offered improved economy, comfort and convenience to travellers. The uneven terrain and wet climate, combined with their high construction and maintenance costs, had precluded roads from being anything but a short-term solution for the transport ills of the West Coast. The experiences gained from the Mount Bischoff mines had shown that neither roads nor horse drawn tramways could cater for the heavy traffic generated by mining industries.<sup>236</sup> As with roads, construction of the railways also proved difficult on the West Coast. The first railway to be built was the twenty-eight and a half mile Strahan to Zeehan line, the tender being awarded to Hobart contractors, TA Reynolds and Company. Works commenced at the Strahan end on 24 November 1889. The scheduled date for completion was ambitiously set for 1 December 1890. From the outset progress was slow, with frequent delays caused by the wet climate, shortages of construction materials and the inability to obtain labour willing to work under such trying conditions. Built to standard Tasmanian Government Railway specifications, the 3' 6" gauge railway had a maximum grade of 1 in 40, minimum curves of five chains radius, and used 43 lb/yard rail. The line was eventually opened on 4 February 1892, at a cost of £227,025, including rolling stock.<sup>237</sup>

The railway's construction produced the desired snowball effect for the Zeehan silverfield. It provided investors and developers with a newfound confidence in the Zeehan and Dundas areas. In November 1890 a Hobart based consortium was granted rights to construct a railway between Zeehan and Dundas.<sup>238</sup> Built to the same specifications as the line from Strahan, the seven and a half mile line, together with a short branch line to Anderson's lease, was opened to traffic on 25 April 1892. On completion, the owners of the railway leased it to the Tasmanian Government Railways, which enabled the line to be worked in conjunction with its Strahan to Zeehan operations. Such were the sanguine expectations of developers at the time, further consortia sought approval to build railways to Dundas. Two of the groups secured Acts

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<sup>235</sup> HAJ, District Surveyors' Reports, 1882, paper 104, p. 6.

<sup>236</sup> L Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 1997, pp. 38-39.

<sup>237</sup> L Rae, *A History of Railways and Tramways on Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, L Rae, 1986, pp. 28-42.

<sup>238</sup> The principals comprised John Dye La Monte and John Russell and the terms and conditions of approval are described in *The Mount Dundas and Zeehan Railway Act*, Number 54 of 1890.

of Parliament but only one, the New Dundas Tramway Company,<sup>239</sup> actually commenced construction. Designed to link Dundas with the Broken Hill Ore Dressing and Smelting Company's Argenton Smelters, located on the Strahan Railway, works were commenced in October 1891 but were never completed. The Dundas silver ore-bodies proved to be low grade<sup>240</sup> and many mines were abandoned before the line had progressed an appreciable distance.<sup>241</sup>

The excitement created by the silver boom at Zeehan heightened prospecting activity and investor speculation in the region. Railway Leagues were formed in Hobart and Launceston to promote the construction of railways to capture the West Coast mineral traffic. In some instances the railways were linked with the construction of refineries and other ancillary processing activities. Railways sanctioned by Parliament included a line from Burnie,<sup>242</sup> a second from Hobart<sup>243</sup> and a third from Launceston.<sup>244</sup> The era of railway construction and expansionism had arrived on the West Coast and over the ensuing decade many ambitious schemes would be advanced. A significant number of the proposals gained enabling legislation. Of those that were eventually built, only a few prospered. The sudden collapse of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land, on 3 August 1891, dampened investment enthusiasm on the West Coast, causing the closure of some of the lower grade mines in the Zeehan area. Not so affected was the keenness of the railway promoters. During the last four months of 1891 nine West Coast railway and tramway Acts were passed by Parliament.<sup>245</sup>

Promoters were keen to share similar profits as produced by the Silverton Tramway Company's thirty-six mile railway that had been completed in 1887 and linked the Silverton and Broken Hill mines with the South Australian railway system. Promoted by James Reid, the Silverton Tramway 'became as rich as a silver mine, paying 30 per cent dividends in poor years and 50 per cent in good years.'<sup>246</sup> Any comparison with the Silverton Railway was dangerous as it was constructed through

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<sup>239</sup> The *New Dundas Tramway Company's Act*, Number 23 of 1891, was passed by Parliament on 19 October 1891. The partially built railway was later converted to a horse drawn tramway and was known locally as the Mariposa Tramway.

<sup>240</sup> A McIntosh Reid, *The Dundas Mineral Field*, Department of Mines Geological Survey Bulletin No. 36, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>241</sup> Rae, *A History of Railways and Tramways on Tasmania's West Coast*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>242</sup> The proposal to build a line between Waratah and Zeehan is described in *The Waratah and Zeehan Railway Act*, Number 15 of 1891, approved 15 September 1891.

<sup>243</sup> The proposal for the line from Hobart to Zeehan is described in *The Derwent Valley and Zeehan Railway Act*, Number 16 of 1891, approved 15 September 1891.

<sup>244</sup> The line to connect through to Launceston was via the extension of the existing Government railway which terminated at Chudleigh, on the Mole Creek line. It is described in *The Chudleigh and Zeehan Railway Act*, Number 39 of 1891, approved 17 November 1891.

<sup>245</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, pp. 47-52.

<sup>246</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, pp. 262-263.

easy country and presented few engineering difficulties, a far different proposition to the country encountered on the West Coast.<sup>247</sup> It was the same James Reid who was the principal force behind the line from Burnie to Zeehan, described in *The Waratah and Zeehan Railway Act*, passed by Parliament on 15 September 1891. Reid secured an option to purchase the Emu Bay and Mount Bischoff railway and sought to extend that railway from near Waratah through to Zeehan. Success would ensure Burnie, located at Emu Bay, became the major outlet for West Coast mineral produce. To assist in raising finance for his venture, Reid gained the support of his Broken Hill and South Australian railway colleagues. They endorsed the railway and favourably compared its potential, and that of the Zeehan silver mines, to those of the highly successful Silverton Tramway and the Broken Hill silver deposits.<sup>248</sup>

Reid's proposal drew significant comment from the parochial southern and northern based business interests in Tasmania. The government viewed the matter with some concern as the volume of traffic carried on its Strahan to Zeehan line would suffer if the proposed line was constructed. However, it had promoted much of the activity by commissioning surveys on all three routes, from Burnie, Launceston and Hobart, a few years earlier. The Hobart to Zeehan line was 167 miles in length, the unmade portion being 129 miles. The Launceston to Zeehan route was 145 miles, of which 86 miles was still to be built. Both of these surveyed routes traversed challenging country. If constructed, they would prove very expensive to operate. The proposed Burnie line compared favourably with the Hobart and Launceston options. Although it traversed some difficult sidelings and valleys, its total length was 92 miles of which only 44 miles remained unmade.<sup>249</sup>

After much political agitation and various failed attempts to raise capital, all three proposals lapsed. The practicalities of building a conventional railway through such difficult country were considered to be high risk, which deterred investors from backing the ventures. In time, consideration would be given to building narrow gauge railways about the difficult West Coast terrain. They would prove cheaper to build and offered the advantages of climbing steeper gradients and employing tighter curves. In the early 1890's a myriad of 2' gauge steam powered tramways had evolved about Zeehan, providing cheap and efficient feeder services between the outlying districts, the concentrating mills and the Zeehan Railway Station.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 February 1892.

<sup>248</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, pp. 50-54.

<sup>249</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, p. 49.

<sup>250</sup> L Whitham, *Railways and Tramways of Zeehan*, *THRA*, Vol. 18, pp. 65-83.

Of the three railways constructed on the West Coast by 1892, only one had achieved reasonable success.<sup>251</sup> Early operations on the Waratah to Emu Bay line had faltered due to the limited freight outside that generated by the tin mines at Mt Bischoff.<sup>252</sup> The Dundas line had been leased to the government and produced only a modest return to its owners. The government by now was the major operator of railways in Tasmania. By the end of 1892 it operated 419.75 miles of railway, comprising a total of ten lines.<sup>253</sup> The Strahan-Zeehan railway was the one shining light for the government. In its first full year of operations (1893) it yielded a profit of £2,788 12s.2d., the only one in the whole government system to do so.<sup>254</sup>

For the owners of the Mount Lyell Copper Mine, the construction of a railway through to Strahan was considered essential to the success of their venture. In June 1892 a Zeehan based consortium gave notice that it intended to apply to Parliament for leave to bring in a Bill for a railway from Mount Reid<sup>255</sup> to Strahan, with an off-shoot branch line to Mount Lyell.<sup>256</sup> This scheme lapsed as the land to be traversed was totally unsuitable. The attempt did prompt the Mount Lyell Company to seek approval from Parliament to build its own railway. The Select Committee convened to consider the Bill examined only two witnesses, asked minimal questions, and recommended the Bill to the House of Assembly.<sup>257</sup>

Initially, the Mount Lyell Company anticipated building a conventional railway, with similar specifications to those of the Strahan to Zeehan line. However, the provisions of *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act*, passed by Parliament on 21 December 1892, did offer some flexibility should the terrain prove more difficult than expected. This Act required the gauge to be not less than 2' 6", the curves not less than four chains radius, the grade no steeper than 1 in 33 and the rails to be at least forty-three pounds to the yard. Construction works were to commence within eighteen months of the Bill being passed and were to be fully completed by 21 December 1896.

<sup>251</sup> The railways comprised the Emu Bay and Mount Bischoff Railway Company's line between Burnie and Waratah (opened 15 July 1884), the Government's Strahan to Zeehan line (opened 4 February 1892) and the privately owned Zeehan to Dundas line, which opened 25 April 1892 and was leased to the Government.

<sup>252</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, pp. 38-39.

<sup>253</sup> JPPP, *Tasmanian Government Railways: Report for 1892, 1893*, paper 46, pp. 3 & 4.

<sup>254</sup> JPPP, *Tasmanian Government Railways: Mr Eddy's Report, and Appendices; with Mr Back's reply*, 1894, paper 55, p. 12.

<sup>255</sup> The spelling of Mount Reid was changed to Mount Read, the orebody having been first pegged in 1891 by AE Conliffe.

<sup>256</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 14 June 1892, p. 1179.

<sup>257</sup> JPPP, *The Mount Lyell Tramway Bill (Private): Report of the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, 1892, paper 119.

The railway would prove to be one of the more ambitious and innovative schemes attempted in Australia and is covered in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

### **Developing Communities – Macquarie Harbour**

The development of mining settlements and towns within the Western Mining District was fragmented prior to 1892, mainly due to the vagaries of the mineral discoveries, the itinerant nature of the prospectors and the lack of transport and infrastructure systems serving the settlements. This section examines the challenges faced by the early inhabitants as they sought to establish within the region. As previously discussed, the first organised settlement in the Macquarie Harbour area was located at Smith Cove. It had been chosen because of its proximity to the starting point of the track to Mount Heemskirk and had developed around 1881, or possibly earlier. A District Constable was posted to the area early in 1881.<sup>258</sup> Port facilities were upgraded in early 1882, their use officially sanctioned on 9 January 1882 by the proclamation of Smith Cove as a Sub-Port of Macquarie Harbour, effective on and after 1 February 1882.<sup>259</sup>

A week after signing the proclamation Tasmania's Governor, Sir George Cumine Strahan, signed a second proclamation. This time he endorsed the renaming of Smith Cove to Strahan.<sup>260</sup> In February 1882 George Innes, District Surveyor, prepared a survey plan of sixty-three lots in readiness for the 10 May auction to be held in Hobart.<sup>261</sup> Forty-six lots were sold at Strahan by the Crown during 1882 and a further seven the following year. Cells, police accommodation and a Customs Office were built on the Esplanade, close to the jetty.<sup>262</sup> As port activities increased, a Sub-inspector for police was stationed at Strahan to perform the duties of Landing Waiter for Customs. A Constable was allocated the lesser job of Tide Waiter of Customs.<sup>263</sup>

Strahan's future at its Smith Cove setting was short. Prospectors making their way to the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield soon found it more convenient to disembark at Long Bay, a little more than a mile to the north. The area around Smith Cove lacked fresh water and was exposed to rough weather, whereas Long Bay offered

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<sup>258</sup> HAJ, Territorial Police: Inspector's Report, 1880-1881, 1881, paper 106, p. 3.

<sup>259</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 10 January 1882, p. 157.

<sup>260</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 17 January 1882, pp. 203-4.

<sup>261</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 28 March 1882, p. 743. Map Reference Strahan S/63, Number 89473, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.

<sup>262</sup> HAJ, Mining Districts: Return of Amounts received from Mining Districts during the Years 1881, 1882, and 1883, and of Amounts expended on Roads, Bridges, &c. in those Districts for the same period, 1884, paper 57, pp. 4 & 7.

<sup>263</sup> HAJ, Territorial Police: Inspector's Report, 1883, paper 34, p. 8.



ample fresh water, a deepwater frontage to land and was located in a sheltered situation.<sup>264</sup> Recognising the growing permanency of the region, the government passed the *Municipal District of Macquarie Act*, 1883, and appointed William Henry Glover to assess the yearly values of the properties within the new municipality.<sup>265</sup> Broken into the Mount Heemskirk, Strahan and Corinna Divisions, the Valuation Roll compiled in 1884 showed three storehouses, a shop and a cottage located on the Crown Esplanade at Smith Cove. A further twenty freehold lots, all of which were vacant, were also placed on the rates roll for the small township.<sup>266</sup>

As the new Long Bay settlement began to grow, the 1885 Valuation Roll differentiated between the villages, the first being Smith Cove, Macquarie Harbour, and the latter as Long Bay, Strahan. The Smith Cove settlement subsequently became known as Old Strahan and Long Bay assumed the name of Strahan. The settlement at Old Strahan was eventually abandoned. The last of the cottages on the Esplanade were removed from the Valuation Roll by 1889.<sup>267</sup> The new settlement at Long Bay blossomed quickly. In August 1883 storekeeper, Frederick Henry, wrote to Charles Sprent, the Deputy-Commissioner of Crown Lands, seeking to purchase a site at Long Bay.<sup>268</sup> He did not wait for a formal survey to be completed, merely relocating his belongings to a convenient location. He was joined by a number of other keen speculators, also eager to establish at Long Bay. By Christmas Day 1883 the settlement included Henry Zeplin's partly built King River Hotel.<sup>269</sup> The 1884 Valuation Roll records show Henry, JJ Gaffney and John White to be the first occupiers of land at Long Bay.<sup>270</sup>

The Crown-owned Esplanade area developed in an unplanned fashion. Demand for land in this narrow commercial strip led to a number of disputes, particularly between hotel owners, Gaffney and Harvey, and merchant FO Henry.<sup>271</sup> The area in front of the hotels, stores and shops was used as an open store. Henry built a 160 foot long jetty for his steamer *Meteor*, which plied the route between Long Bay, Trial Harbour and Corinna. Describing the early township of Strahan and the cramped

<sup>264</sup> Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, p. 18.

<sup>265</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 4 December 1883, p. 1604.

<sup>266</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 11 November 1884, pp. 1675-80.

<sup>267</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1889, p. 764.

<sup>268</sup> J Ware, *Strahan: Macquarie Harbour*, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, 1981 (Facsimile of 1908 edition), pp. 15-16.

<sup>269</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 January 1897.

<sup>270</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 11 November 1884, p. 1679.

<sup>271</sup> JPPP, Public-House on Esplanade at Strahan: Correspondence, 1887, paper 127.

occupation around the Esplanade, Wilberton Tilley considered it to look 'rather pretty on approach from the harbour, but loses character on closer acquaintance.'<sup>272</sup>

For a short while the new settlement assumed the name of Long Bay, but soon became known as Strahan. The first Town Plan for the new settlement of Strahan was prepared by District Surveyor, David Jones, and was completed in October 1884. The first thirty-seven lots were offered for sale by auction in Hobart on 16 December 1884.<sup>273</sup> The boundaries of the Town of Strahan were amended to include all land within the line north from Sophia Point, for a distance of approximately 550 chains, then in a westerly direction to the South Pacific Ocean, south along Ocean Beach to the northern entrance to Macquarie Harbour and then around the foreshore and back to Sophia Point.<sup>274</sup>

The commencement of construction works on the railway to Zeehan on 24 November 1889 expanded activity. By February 1890 the fixed population of Strahan was estimated to be between three and four hundred people and rapidly increasing. Not included among these figures were the transient population of miners and railway workers. New plans were prepared to cope with the rapid expansion of settlers. The western end of the town, comprising low-lying land on either side of Manuka Rivulet, was favoured over the elevated plateau. Some of the town's principal houses were erected here. Locating the main railway station and workshops on this flat area attracted some commercial activity close to the line. Most houses were built of wood or of galvanised iron, while the floating population connected with the railway works lived in tents.<sup>275</sup>

By 1890, commercial buildings included three hotels, three stores, a chemist's and a butcher's shop, the National Bank Chambers and a cordial factory.<sup>276</sup> Because of the freight generated by the railway works and the Zeehan silver mines, Strahan's port facilities were unable to cope. Space was also needed alongside the wharf area to accommodate the new railway station and shunting yards. As a consequence, a large section in front of the King River Hotel, requiring in excess of 10,000 cubic yards, was reclaimed to cater for the port and railway needs.<sup>277</sup> In the latter half of 1891 a local businessman Mr JJ Gaffney erected the three storey Palace Hotel at West Strahan. Accommodation comprised sixty-six bedrooms, a large meeting room, dining and

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<sup>272</sup> Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>273</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 18 November 1884, p. 1737.

<sup>274</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 June 1887, p. 911.

<sup>275</sup> JPPP, Strahan and Mount Zeehan District: Report on Sanitary Condition, 1890, paper 34, p. 3.

<sup>276</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 27 May 1890, pp. 879-880.

<sup>277</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 March 1892.

billiard rooms and various saloon and entertainment areas. Built of first class materials, and featuring stained glass doors and expensive fittings, the hotel exuded confidence and prosperity.<sup>278</sup>

Little attention had been given to sanitary issues. Serious health conditions had already arisen in Zeehan, which caused the government to seek a report on all major settlements in the Western Mining District. The ensuing study identified a number of disturbing health issues for Strahan. Engineering Inspector, Alfred Mault, observed that waste generated from commercial, residential and farming operations could all contaminate Strahan's existing unprotected water supplies. Domestic and commercial sewage was poorly dealt with. The drainage of run-off water and disposal of household waste needed rectification. Mault was concerned at the decaying and putrescible matter that had collected on the banks of the shallow foreshore. His extensive report recommended a number of works, including water reservoirs, waterways, street drains, collection of sewage and household waste and a sea-wall to prevent the build-up of foreshore waste. Mault supported the push by the locals for a Town Board and a Local Board of Health.<sup>279</sup>

Initially Mault had been encouraged by the willingness of people to attend to health issues in Strahan, but upon his return the following year he was extremely critical of the lack of progress. The newly-formed Local Board of Health had not passed the necessary by-laws, nor had it organised a sanitary service or appointed an Officer of Health. Mault was particularly scathing of the squalor of the tents and huts occupied by the 'unsettled portion of the population.'<sup>280</sup> An outbreak of typhoid in September the same year found amenities in Strahan badly wanting. A tent was used to house the unfortunate patients. Health facilities were eventually improved with the construction of a two-ward hospital on the road to East Strahan. Built by local tradesmen, Wilson and Pontifex, the hospital was completed mid-1892, its cost being shared between government and the local community.<sup>281</sup> Mault's criticisms achieved their desired effect. The necessary by-laws were approved in April 1892, giving effect to the operations of the local Health Board.<sup>282</sup> The appointment of the Health Inspector followed a month later.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 December 1891.

<sup>279</sup> JPPP, Strahan and Mount Zeehan District: Report on Sanitary Condition, 1890, paper 34, pp. 3-7.

<sup>280</sup> JPPP, Town of Strahan: Report of Engineering Inspector, 1891, paper 87, p. 3.

<sup>281</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 June 1892.

<sup>282</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 12 April 1892, pp. 835-839.

<sup>283</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 June 1892, p. 1129.



In 1889 the Inspector for Territorial Police increased police numbers in the Western Mining District to six, the Sub-inspector being located at Strahan.<sup>284</sup> Within two years, a new watch-house comprising a cottage, commodious day-room, cells and yard had been erected near the courthouse at West Strahan. Police numbers were again increased to include a Superintendent, one Sergeant and ten Constables. Rail transport within the district greatly assisted the police. Increased attempts at claim jumping, gold stealing and breaking and entering for valuable mining script, had raised safety issues for the general population and the ongoing prosperity of the area. The Commissioner of Police had observed an increase in crime figures in the Macquarie District during 1891 'where the excitement connected with the mines attracted, as it usually does, many objectionable characters.'<sup>285</sup> A new courthouse and facilities, together with an office for the Registrar of Mines, were built during 1891.<sup>286</sup>

Apart from the town roads and some primitive drainage, Strahan enjoyed few amenities. The 5 April 1891 Census of Tasmania placed Strahan's permanent population at 561 of which 200 were females and 361 males. Inhabited dwellings numbered 112.<sup>287</sup> Strahan's population figures rose steadily as the demand for port and provisioning services grew. Wilberton Tilley estimated Strahan's population at 800 by the end of 1891.<sup>288</sup> Anticipating population growth was a mainland consortium, headed by Melbourne engineer John Coates, that brought a Private Bill before Parliament, seeking to supply gas and electricity for lighting, heating and motive power in and about Strahan, Zeehan and other places. The Bill provided for the coal to be landed at Strahan for used in the production of coal gas. Hoping to re-create the success of similar projects at Broken Hill and other populated centres, the promoters had forecast a population of 25,000 people within three years. The high costs of coal, an inability to provide a supply to the whole region and the refusal of government to grant a total monopoly for electricity and gas production saw the project lapse.<sup>289</sup>

A new state school was built at Strahan in 1890, with forty-nine pupils on the first Roll.<sup>290</sup> General community facilities included a branch of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows (March 1892),<sup>291</sup> a new Church of England church,

<sup>284</sup> JPPP, Territorial Police: Inspector's Report for the Year 1889, 1890, paper 36, p. 5.

<sup>285</sup> JPPP, Territorial Police: Commissioner's Report for the Year 1891, 1892, paper 78, p. 5.

<sup>286</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 November 1891.

<sup>287</sup> JPPP, Census of Tasmania, 1891, 1893, paper 67, p. 21.

<sup>288</sup> Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, p. 18.

<sup>289</sup> JPPP, West Coast Gas and Other Works Bill, 1891, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, &c, paper 136.

<sup>290</sup> JPPP, Education Department, Report for 1890, 1891, paper 51, p. 3 & 22-23.

<sup>291</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 March 1892.

which held its first service on 12 June 1892,<sup>292</sup> and a Mechanics' Institute that opened the following year.<sup>293</sup> Strahan acquired the reputation as the seaside sport and recreation town at an early stage. Discounted railway excursion fares were provided from Zeehan to entice the miners and their families wishing to escape the drudgeries of their homes and workplace to visit Strahan. Its four large hotels provided a good standard of accommodation, while boats could be hired for excursions on the harbour. Fishing was also a popular pastime, with good fish stocks caught at Macquarie Heads. Shooters could generally find plenty of game close to the town. Scenic walks had been developed and longer boat trips were organised to visit the old penal settlement at Sarah Island and the Gordon River.<sup>294</sup>

### **Developing Communities – Queen River and Linda Valley Mining Settlements**

The sites chosen for many of the early mining settlements on the West Coast were primarily determined by their proximity to the mines and smelters. In some instances prospectors simply built their huts and a community established, well before the first inspection by government authorities. This practice, particularly in the Mount Lyell area, created many difficulties in the form of squatters. Similar occurrences of unplanned settlements had been experienced on the Victorian goldfields where:

Prospectors roaming over the hill and dale, in search of quartz reefs or alluvial mines, find gold here and there in payable quantities and no sooner does news of any discovery get wind than a rush takes place. An impromptu village soon springs up on the most convenient site adjacent to the workings, and if the yield is good, or even if the indications are satisfactory, people begin to settle down, and in an incredibly short space of time most of the necessities, and some of the luxuries, of civilisation, are accumulated around them. Presently the surveyor comes along...houses spring up, schools are established, churches built, and almost before the community at large has become aware of its existence, our township has emerged from the chrysalis state.<sup>295</sup>

Two small settlements were established in the Mount Lyell area prior to 1893, comprising Lynchford in the Queen River Valley and the Linda Valley gold diggings. Lynchford was sited at the crossing of the Queen River, twenty-two miles from Strahan, on the road to Mount Lyell. Central to the diggings in the area, it was located on relatively flat land and had plentiful water. The first buildings recorded at Lynchford<sup>296</sup> were a store and stable in the ownership of Gaffney and Harvey of Strahan.<sup>297</sup> This occupation appears to have preceded the survey of the township, which was undertaken

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<sup>292</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 June 1892.

<sup>293</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 31 May 1893.

<sup>294</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 April 1892.

<sup>295</sup> R Paull, *Old Walhalla, Portrait of a Gold Town*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1963, p. 9.

<sup>296</sup> Lynchford was briefly referred to as the Queen River settlement in its early days.

by District Surveyor, David Jones, on 12 October 1887. Twenty-seven lots were offered at the first land auction held in Hobart on 20 December 1887.<sup>298</sup> The Queen River Hotel was the first licensed premises on the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield, on the western side of the Queen River.<sup>299</sup>

The prospectors, being of a temporary disposition, did not generally purchase land and the early land sales at Lynchford were limited to hoteliers and merchants. The diggings about the Queen River did not develop to any extent before the commencement of the construction of the Mount Lyell Company's railway in December 1894. Lynchford had gained access to the outside world with the construction of the Strahan to Hobart telegraph, which reached the small settlement in November 1891.<sup>300</sup> Reporting on the health conditions at the Queen River settlement in March 1890, Alfred Mault, commented that 'there is now only a small population engaged in gold-mining there; but miner's huts are numerous and in the usual condition, without privies, and with refuse lying about.'<sup>301</sup>

Mining was not the only industry in the Lynchford area. Many Huon pine trees were cut, lawfully and unlawfully, and left on the banks of the Queen River, waiting for the flood waters to carry them down, via the King River, to Macquarie Harbour. At the mouth of the King River the logs were collected by a boom and rafted to the sawmills at Strahan.<sup>302</sup> Floating the Huon pine logs had been a time-honoured practice, there being no suitable roads to cart them to the sawmills. This activity had caused damage to the newly erected bridge over the Queen River at Lynchford and piners were put on notice that they would be responsible for any damages should the practice continue.<sup>303</sup>

The original settlement on the goldfield had been at Lynch's Creek, two miles to the east of Lynchford. A post office was opened at the settlement during 1886.<sup>304</sup> While many of the isolated mining communities had gained a reputation for their rough bush huts and calico tents, the King River Prospecting and Gold Mining Association's small settlement at Lynch's Creek offered a very civilised appearance to solicitor and historian, James Backhouse Walker.<sup>305</sup> During his 25 February 1887 visit to the area Walker enjoyed a hearty meal and observed the Leatherwood bee trees, causing him to

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<sup>297</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 29 November 1887, p. 1888.

<sup>298</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 15 November 1887, pp. 1811-1812. Original Map Reference Lynchford L/73, amended to Queenstown Q/11A, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.

<sup>299</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1889, p. 765.

<sup>300</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 November 1891.

<sup>301</sup> JPPP, Strahan and Mount Zeehan District: Report on Sanitary Condition, 1890, paper 34, p. 10.

<sup>302</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 20 March 1888, p. 576.

<sup>303</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 21 February 1888, p. 437.

<sup>304</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 5 October 1886, p. 1472.

<sup>305</sup> N Smith, 'James Backhouse Walker (1841-1899)', *ADB*, vol. 6, pp. 340-341.

liken the West Coast to a land flowing with condensed milk and honey. He noted 'a neat manager's house built of King William pine, and a large substantial wooden building in which the quartz machinery is being erected, and quite a group of good wooden huts.'<sup>306</sup>

In the eastern shadows of Mount Lyell, nestled in the Linda Valley, were the scattered buildings occupied by the prospectors and miners. Living conditions in the huts were basic, the luxuries being difficult to transport from Strahan. On his February 1887 trip Walker was astonished by the amount of mining work done in the Linda Valley and about the Iron Blow. He observed the miners and prospectors to be a fine class of men. They were intelligent and hardworking and exhibited gracious hospitality. At the time thirty-five men worked in the valley. Walker described Con Curtin's hut, which was perched high up on the slopes of Mount Lyell as:

The first rough struggle of man with primitive nature...the hut in which we slept is a rough one built of rough split palings with a wooden chimney showing large cracks into the outer air and a large piece of calico let into the gable for window. No regular windows, glass being a scarce commodity in these parts.<sup>307</sup>

The gradual development, welfare programs and demographics of the towns in the Lyell region and about the shores of Macquarie Harbour are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis.

### **Early Telegraph and Postal Communications**

Postal and telegraph communications proved to be critical factors in reducing isolation on the West Coast, with the electric telegraph, and later the telephone, providing an almost instantaneous transfer of information. The overland telegraph system to the West Coast was vital in reducing isolation. It provided a degree of safety, law and order as and when the need arose. Stock exchanges and newspapers used it to provide a worldwide coverage. For decades the telegraph became an essential part of life on the West Coast. Blainey in *The Tyranny of Distance*, observes that the influence of the telegraph has been forgotten, 'nevertheless the telegraph affected such a variety of commercial and social activities that its collective influence must have been powerful.'<sup>308</sup>

The government commenced work on erecting the first telegraph system on the West Coast during 1883, between Strahan and Trial Harbour, with the intention of

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<sup>306</sup> JB Walker, *Walk to the West*, Hobart, The Royal Society of Tasmania, 1992, pp. 50-51.

<sup>307</sup> Walker, *Walk to the West*, pp. 44-47.



extending the line to Corinna.<sup>309</sup> Although the extension from Waratah to Corinna was completed during the 1883/84 year, the through extension to Strahan was delayed until 1889. This eventual connection provided the West Coast with a telegraph route via Waratah, Burnie and Launceston, to Hobart, a distance of 370 miles. The system experienced difficulties through line breakages and problems with the intervening offices along the route. The Superintendent of Telegraphs, Robert Henry, had fully recognised the very special needs of communication with the West Coast when he recommended to government that a line from Ouse to Strahan be erected 'in order to give complete and speedy transit of business.'<sup>310</sup> Henry's recommendation was duly implemented and the work between Ouse, via Mount Lyell to Strahan, was completed and opened on 5 August 1892.<sup>311</sup> The extension of telegraph lines to East Strahan and Zeehan had been completed the previous year. The first telephone communication was provided between Strahan and Macquarie Heads during August 1892.<sup>312</sup>

Postal facilities were established at FO Henry's Strahan store in 1884, a service he maintained until the Strahan Post Office and Savings Bank facility was opened in early 1888.<sup>313</sup> While the postal service was greatly appreciated by the West Coast population, it was far from reliable and apt to cause much frustration. As the mining tracks opened up districts, mail deliveries were extended, with a weekly overland service from 1885 serving the mining areas between Waratah and Strahan. As the population of the King River and Linda Valley Goldfield increased, a second post office for the region was opened at Lynch's Creek during 1886.<sup>314</sup> Hope for a more reliable overland postal service was offered when work commenced on the overland track between Ouse and Mount Lyell during 1887, but it was a further four years before such commenced. A third post office was opened at Mount Lyell in 1891. Upon the upgrading of the overland route from Ouse, the *Hobart Gazette* advised 'mails for Strahan, Remine, Zeehan, and other places on the West Coast are forwarded overland every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, at 7 A.M., and by every steamer leaving.'<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, p. 229.

<sup>309</sup> HAJ, West Coast: Report of Engineer of Roads upon all the works executed under Overseer Clay's superintendence, 1883, paper 127.

<sup>310</sup> JPPP, West Coast Telegraphs: Report by Superintendent of Telegraphs, 1890, paper 132.

<sup>311</sup> JPPP, Electric Telegraph Department: Report for 1892, 1893, paper 41.

<sup>312</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 August 1892.

<sup>313</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 10 January 1888, p. 150.

<sup>314</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 5 October 1886, p. 1472.

<sup>315</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 July 1891, p. 1228.

## **Conclusions**

The period under review highlighted the difficulties of exploration, mining, transport and occupation in harsh climatic conditions, amid the inhospitable terrain. Exploration throughout the Lyell region had been hampered by the lack of tracks and roads. Economic returns from the early gold mines had been minimal due to the application of inappropriate technology and defective work practices. The shallow access into Macquarie Harbour had proven hazardous to shipping and had severely limited the sizes of boats servicing the region. Government inaction in resolving the problem was stifling the development of the potentially lucrative Zeehan and Lyell mining fields. Furthermore, the construction of a conventional railway between Strahan and Mount Lyell was fraught with problems due to the difficult nature of the intervening country. By the end of 1892 the region had reached the crossroads. Innovative solutions were required before the vast mineral riches could be mined, processed and exported to mainland and world markets.

The following chapter examines the development of the Mount Lyell mining field and the rise to complete dominance by the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company through clever management and the introduction of innovative mining and ore-treatment processes. The Company's influence over the region would prove to be significant, as was its contribution to the economic welfare of Tasmania. The considerable difficulties encountered in developing shipping, track and road and the railway and tramway transport systems about the region are separately discussed. The final two chapters deal with the struggle to overcome and adapt to the natural elements and hostile environment to first survive and then to successfully occupy the frontier wilderness.

## CHAPTER 2: MINING, MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENT 1893 - 1935

### Introduction

At the start of 1893 the owners of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company, No Liability, eagerly awaited the arrival of Edward Peters, the American consultant appointed to report on the prospects of the copper deposits at the Mount Lyell mine. The gold recovery operations occurring the decade preceding Peters' arrival had been most frustrating. The ore had not produced sufficient returns through the application of conventional mining and treatment processes. Bowes Kelly and his Broken Hill colleagues recognised the potential of the large quantities of copper that had been overlooked in the favour of gold recovery. Preliminary investigations revealed the copper ore body to be vast and like no other being mined in Australia. It was for this reason such an eminent authority on copper had been employed. Peters' worldly experiences in copper mines and treatment methodologies would provide the owners with the necessary advice as to how to develop the mine and treat the copper ore. Peters' report, completed in May 1893, confirmed that the unusually large deposits of high grade pyritic ore could be profitably mined and treated, although the exact method of processing required further studies. Peters expressed a strong hope that the newly-evolving pyritic smelting technique could be used.<sup>1</sup>

The early sections of this chapter examine the roles played by Bowes Kelly, William Jamieson and William Knox in developing, guiding and controlling the operations at Mount Lyell. These men did not work alone. They applied valuable experiences and contacts provided by their fellow Broken Hill Proprietary colleagues with great effect. They secured the services of competent specialists to develop and guide the Mount Lyell operations through its formative years. Peters' important groundwork and the instrumental role played in the eventual developments at Mount Lyell are also considered.

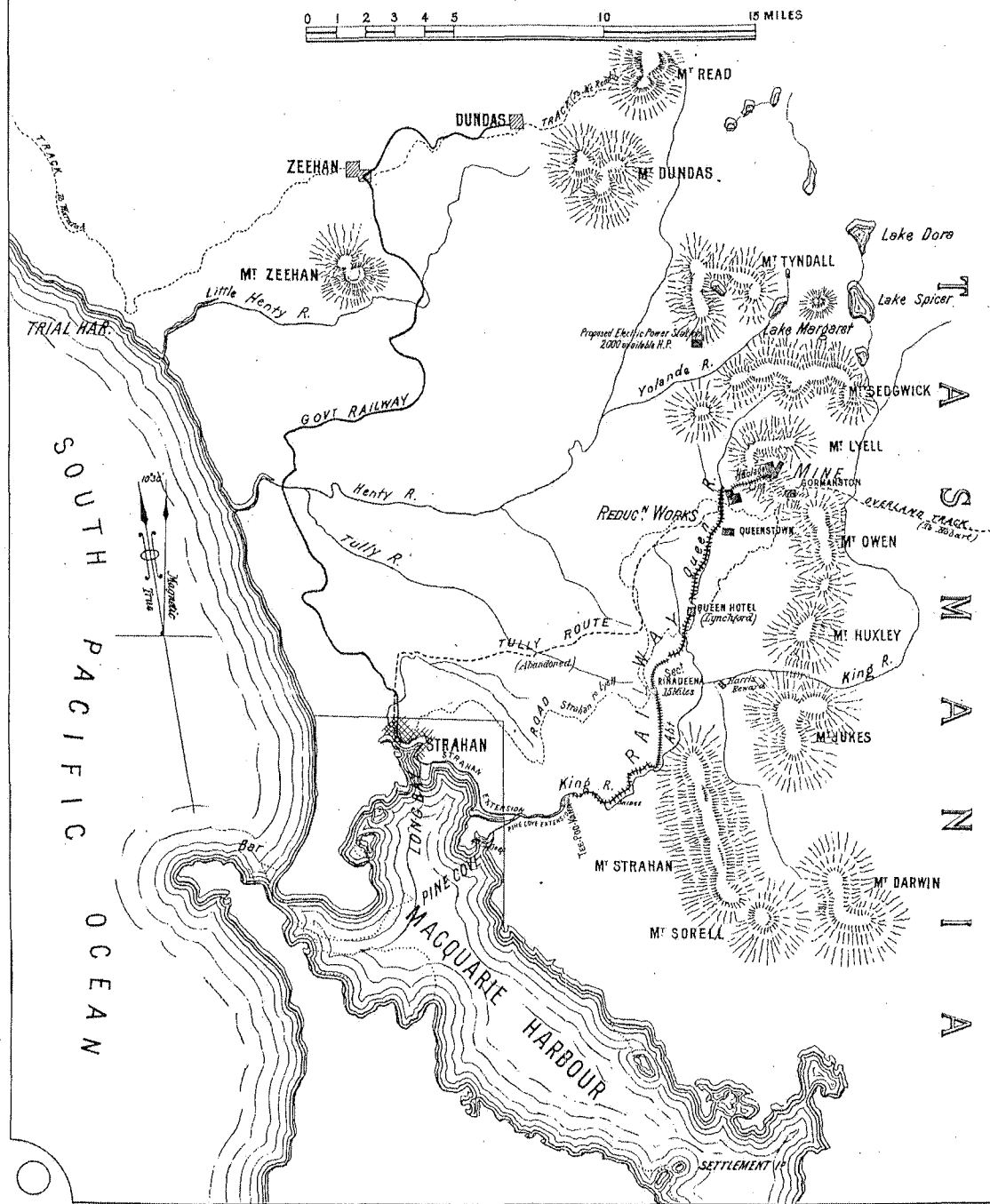
Within the first few years of the twentieth century the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company became known worldwide for its rich copper ores and the landmark application of true pyritic smelting achieved by Robert Carl Sticht, the Company's manager. Eminent geologist and academic, John Gregory, was one of many drawn to the region to behold the Mount Lyell operations. His task was to record the geological

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<sup>1</sup> Report by ED Peters on the property of The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, 15 May 1893, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown, p. 25.

# THE MOUNT LYELL MINING & RAILWAY COMPANY LIMITED

## LOCALITY PLAN



*Kawak*  
 Supr. Eng.  
 20/3/86

MAP 10 - MOUNT LYELL LOCALITY AND RAILWAY, MARCH 1896

structure of the massive pyritic orebody.<sup>2</sup> Gregory was surprised at the successes achieved by the Company, considering it faced many challenges not encountered by competitors. He noted the difficult nature of the country as a setting for the Company's activities, the lack of cheap labour, and the general isolation of the operations from world copper markets. Despite these apparent adversities, the Company had succeeded admirably. Gregory gave credit to the courage of the Melbourne financiers for backing the venture and praised the perseverance, administrative ability and judgement of the directors, who had selected the men of high scientific skill to conduct the operations. Gregory described the Mount Lyell venture as 'one of the brightest stories in the annals of Australian mining.'<sup>3</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company would not have succeeded through the period 1893–1935 without the capable control and direction provided by its managers, Robert Sticht and Russell Murray. Not only was Sticht an innovative metallurgist, he also proved to be a competent manager and a master tactician. The early impact of the Mount Lyell Company's operation on the Tasmanian economy was substantial. During 1905 the Company smelted 426,854 tons of ore, yielding 8,506 tons of blister copper, which included 732,019oz of silver and 24,567oz of gold, worth a combined value of £808,314. This comprised 46.75% of the State's overall mineral production and 21.78% of Tasmania's entire export figures for the year.<sup>4</sup> The Company directly employed 2,094 people and was then paying dividends well in excess of any other mineral concern. The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company had assumed the mantle as Tasmania's single most important manufacturer.<sup>5</sup> Sticht's role in directing the Company's rise to dominate the region are outlined in the following chapter along with brief accounts of the innovative accomplishments of the Company during his regime. These included constructing the Lake Margaret power scheme and the developing of the flotation process to treat the low grade copper ores.

In stark contrast to Sticht, Russell Murray's arrival at Mount Lyell in 1900 was unheralded. As a raw engineering graduate from Melbourne, and of slight build, he impressed those around him and, importantly, the Company's directors with his technical skills, bravery, and ability to lead. Recognition of Murray's capabilities saw

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<sup>2</sup> JF Lovering, 'John Walter Gregory (1864-1932)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Volume 9, pp. 100-101.

<sup>3</sup> JW Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, Melbourne, Australasian Institute of Mining Engineers, 1905, pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1905, Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), 1906, paper 11, and JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1905-6, 1906, paper 42.

<sup>5</sup> WH Twelvetrees, *The Progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarter Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1905*, 1906, Mines Department, pp. 12-16.

him elevated through the ranks, to become manager after Sticht's death in 1922. His appointment came at a perilous time for Australian copper mines. Despite the crumbling copper market, under Murray's steadfast leadership and remarkable vision, the Company survived and then prospered through hard times. Murray's early climb through the ranks and his notable achievements in rationalising work practices, implementing large-scale mining and processing techniques, and his introduction of innovative transport systems, are examined in this chapter.

The Mount Lyell Company's success did not come without a massive cost to the surrounding environment. Isolated from close bureaucratic supervision, the Company's managers became virtual rulers of all they beheld. Through the Company's actions, the wholesale clearing and firewood harvesting practices, combined with the effects of bush fires, high rainfall and the toxic sulphur fumes, denuded the countryside of its vegetation and top soil. Mine tailings, slag from the furnaces and industrial and domestic waste were dumped into the waterways, fouling the Queen and King Rivers and creating a major silt problem in Macquarie Harbour. Far less visible, but highly toxic, was the large volume of acid drainage produced by the chemical reaction of rainwater washing over the exposed sulphur rich ores, overburden and slag heaps. Local communities traded jobs and livelihoods for a despoiled environment. An 'out of sight out of mind' mentality prevailed. Complaints to the Company were either ignored or actively suppressed. To many, Queenstown's lunar landscape created a perception of prosperity. The final section of this chapter looks at the wholesale degradation of the landscape and waterways about the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour areas and the early attempts by tourist associations and likeminded bodies to thwart the mass destruction.

### **Providing Direction – The Broken Hill Influence and Edward Peters**

When Bowes Kelly and his fellow partners set about restructuring the activities of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company in January 1892, they faced a number of significant challenges. Under the partners' watchful guidance, the shareholders agreed to wind up the affairs of the old Company at an Extraordinary Meeting held in Melbourne on 15 March 1893. It was replaced by the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited. This section examines the roles played by the men from Broken Hill and the experience they bestowed on the fledgling company. It also outlines the valuable contribution of the American consulting engineer, Edward D Peters, in his thorough assessment of the Mount Lyell mine and wise counsel provided to the directors.

Profitable long term mining operations were few and far between coming into the 1890s on the West Coast. The only major exception was the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company's operations at Mount Bischoff, Waratah.<sup>6</sup> During its short mining history, the West Coast had produced a litany of failed enterprises. Inefficient and expensive transport, inappropriate processing methods and a poor understanding of local conditions were common factors behind many of the failures. These problems confronted Bowes Kelly,<sup>7</sup> William Jamieson<sup>8</sup> and William Knox,<sup>9</sup> when they took on the new management role at Mount Lyell. Transport issues had not been resolved, there was no obvious process to treat the complex copper ore and Kelly's record of investing in speculative mining and smelting ventures on the Zeehan and Dundas silver fields<sup>10</sup> had not met with success. He later confessed to having visited Zeehan in 1888 with William Orr, whereupon they 'spent a good deal of money in developing property – or rather endeavoring to develop it, for we never got anything of very much value.'<sup>11</sup> To a lesser extent, Orr was also an important player in the early development of Mount Lyell. He was a confidant of Kelly and a director for two years.<sup>12</sup>

That the Mount Lyell Company eventually succeeded was largely attributed to the managerial expertise of Kelly, Jamieson and Knox, all of whom had previously played a substantial role in the August 1885 incorporation of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company (BHP). William Jamieson was the first general manager, William Knox the company secretary and Bowes Kelly a founding director. The Broken Hill mine was located in outback New South Wales, 680 miles west of Sydney and 27 miles to the east of the South Australian border. It quickly achieved worldwide notoriety as a silver and lead producer. Bob Solomon, a local historian, comments:

For its first three years the BHP Co. had produced an incredible 7 million ounces of silver (about one-third of the world's output), 28,000 tons of lead and net profit exceeding £1.5 million. Shares in anything that might possibly be another Broken Hill were vigorously traded, but there never was another Broken Hill!<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H Murchie, DI Groves, EL Martin & HK Wellington, *A Century of Tin Mining at Mount Bischoff, 1871-1971*, Department of Mines, Geological Survey Bulletin No. 54, 1972, pp. 39-41.

<sup>7</sup> D Wheeler, 'Anthony Edwin Bowes Kelly (1852-1930)', *ADB*, v. 9, pp. 552-553.

<sup>8</sup> BE Kennedy, 'William Jamieson (1853-1926)', *ADB*, v. 9, pp. 470-471.

<sup>9</sup> D Wheeler, 'William Knox (1850-1913)', *ADB*, v. 9, pp. 631-632.

<sup>10</sup> Further information on the two areas is provided in WH Twelvetees and LK Ward, *The Ore-Bodies of the Zeehan Field*, Department of Mines Geological Survey Bulletin No. 8, 1910, pp. 4-6. and A McIntosh Reid, *The Dundas Mineral Field*, Department of Mines Geological Survey Bulletin No. 36, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 March 1897.

<sup>12</sup> G Browne, 'William Orr (1843-1929)', *ADB*, v. 11, pp. 97-98.

<sup>13</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger Pty Ltd, 1988, p. 57.

Based on honest investment principles the three men achieved the status of mining magnates over the period 1885 to 1914 and all made fortunes.<sup>14</sup> Prior to 1914, they, along with their fellow directors at BHP, invested in all the main base-metal fields and major mining railways across Australia.<sup>15</sup> Over the years the Broken Hill powerbrokers exerted considerable influence over a broad-range of industrial activities. Their wealth of knowledge and strong administrative ability was applied to Mount Lyell and its associated activities. Many parallels existed in the management practices and general operations of the Mount Lyell and the Broken Hill Proprietary Companies. Both were operated from the same Melbourne offices. The early influences driving BHP were spread across three states. It was managed from Victoria, came under New South Wales governmental jurisdiction, and its trade network operated through South Australia. Solomon considers BHP's separation of administration, governance and practical occupation to have been unusual but successful: 'the resolution of these disparate forces might just have seen a cosmopolitanism unique in Australia. The result, rather, was a strange mix of worldly awareness, self-sufficiency and isolationism.'<sup>16</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company enjoyed a similar strange mix. Administered from Victoria, and subject to Tasmanian governance, its trade network was predominantly through mainland ports, from where cargoes were exported because the larger international boats could not access Macquarie Harbour. Kelly's role in the Mount Lyell Company was particularly significant. He is credited with being the "organising brain" and "leading spirit" behind the Mount Lyell developments.<sup>17</sup> Coming from a rural background, Kelly had worked as a jackeroo and drover on Riverina sheep-stations before rising to the position of manager and then a partner in the Billilla Station on the Darling River. After retiring from farming in 1881, Kelly invested in property around the Paroo River. It was here that he made his fortune. News of the silver discoveries at Broken Hill drew him to the district, where he acquired a part share in the Broken Hill mine in 1884. His sound management skills and business acumen made him a logical appointee as a founding director of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company. Through Kelly's prodigious pluck and perseverance, carried out under considerable difficulties, the Mount Lyell operations had come to fruition.<sup>18</sup>

From the inception of the Mount Lyell Company, Bowes Kelly was instrumental in laying the foundations for its growth and diverse operations. Elected as its first

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<sup>14</sup> Wheeler, 'William Knox (1850-1913)', p. 632.

<sup>15</sup> Wheeler, 'Anthony Edwin Bowes Kelly (1852-1930)', p. 552.

<sup>16</sup> Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 March 1897.



Chairman in 1893, he held the position until 1911 and then again from 1914 to 1924. He served as a director for the entire period, up until his death on 16 October 1930, and was a regular visitor to the Mount Lyell operations. His steadfast interest in the Company's activities earned him the tag of "father" of the Mount Lyell mine.<sup>19</sup> Kelly was a massive man with a bone-crushing hand-shake, and was credited with combining financial daring with shrewd appreciation of mining or industrial possibilities. Highly respected amongst his peers, Kelly was three times elected to the prestigious position of Chairman of BHP and was also involved in numerous mining related enterprises on Tasmania's West Coast. His investments 'encouraged the growth of companies which both gave employment to thousands and broadened the base of Australian economic life.'<sup>20</sup>

Kelly's commitment to Tasmania was widespread, involving a diverse range of activities and investments. His long-term association with the Emu Bay Railway Company was never rewarded by the payment of a single dividend during his lifetime. Discussed in Chapter 4, this Company constructed a railway between Guildford Junction and Zeehan in 1897, to link the western mining districts and the north west port of Burnie. Kelly was a director of the company from its inception until his death.<sup>21</sup> His fellow directors fully acknowledged Kelly's long and unique contribution to the Mount Lyell Company, together with his enthusiasm, energy and devotion to its best interests, which remained constant to the end.<sup>22</sup> Blainey pays credit to Kelly, Jamieson and Knox for having shaped the direction of the Company. They had seized an opportunity, then engaged experts from the United States at considerable salaries, and 'followed their advice to the letter.'<sup>23</sup>

The first American expert employed to report on the Mount Lyell mine was Edward Dyer Peters, who arrived on the West Coast in mid-January 1893, in the company of Bowes Kelly and William Orr. The decision to employ Peters was fortuitous. Had he reported negatively on the mine and the proposed developments, then it was likely the whole project would have been scrapped.<sup>24</sup> Government Geological Surveyor, Alexander Montgomery, considered the owners of the Mount Lyell mine were to be complimented on their enterprise and wisdom in appointing

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<sup>18</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 March 1897.

<sup>19</sup> *Argus*, 17 October 1930.

<sup>20</sup> Wheeler, 'Anthony Edwin Bowes Kelly (1852-1930)', p. 553.

<sup>21</sup> L Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 1997, pp. 191-192.

<sup>22</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1930, Queenstown.

<sup>23</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 276.

<sup>24</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 January 1893.

Peters, who was recognised as an authority on copper smelting. Montgomery was impressed with the thoroughness of Peters' field trials and research, and commended the conservative and cautious approach adopted in calculating the predicted profits.<sup>25</sup> Peters had been most impressed with what he had observed. Upon completing his various studies of the orebody he reported to the Company's directors:

I will only say in conclusion that in the past 20 years I have never seen a mining and metallurgical proposition that promises so certainly to be a great and enduring property as this. Two things are absolutely essential to success: a good railway under your own control; and a plant equipped with the most modern and perfect labor-saving machinery, so that all the processes both at mine and smelter shall be mechanical so far as is reasonably possible, that you may be independent of individual labor.<sup>26</sup>

On the treatment of the ore, Peters recommended the tried and trusted smelting process used for lower grade copper ores in America. The procedure would utilise conventional blast furnaces to smelt the ore into matte, which would then be refined on-site into pig-copper using Bessemer converters. The pig-copper, which Peters expected to assay at about 96 per cent copper, would include the silver and gold that had been present in the ore. The final product would then be exported to Europe for refining by electrolysis, a process that separated the three metals. At the time of preparing his report, Peters was aware of the changing technologies in copper processing. He strongly advised the directors to consider pyritic smelting as it had been employed with some success at two plants in America. Peters believed pyritic smelting could be used to great advantage at Mount Lyell, the ores being perfectly suited. The high sulphur content would assist the smelting process and save substantially on the use of coke as a fuel. Its application would reduce smelting costs by 50 per cent alone and would eliminate the need for a roasting plant. Peters considered the 'saving to the company would be something enormous...the cost of smelting would be reduced to a point that would seem almost incredible.'<sup>27</sup>

Historians have understated the role played by Peters in advancing pyritic smelting at Mount Lyell. Blainey contends Peters had been wary of pyritic smelting and did not embrace the pyritic technique.<sup>28</sup> William Taylour, writing c. 1900, referred to 'the ordinary process of reduction by roasting, which Peters had recommended.'<sup>29</sup> Davey, writing more recently, records that Peters had recommended 'the standard roast-

<sup>25</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3, including a report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, 1893, paper 50, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, p. 18. The section written on the early mining history in Gregory's book was written by William Henry Taylour.

smelt-convert procedure.’<sup>30</sup> All three men praise the eventual hero of the day, Robert Sticht, for his rejection of Peters’ plan and the adoption of his pyritic smelting process. Such comments overlook the development of pyritic smelting at the time. Peters’ advice to the directors to employ a standard smelting procedure was based on the best evidence then available. Pyritic smelting was still in its formative stages and Peters did not wish to raise the directors’ hopes too high until more research was done. He strongly canvassed the use of pyritic smelting in several sections of his report and he undertook carefully to research the matter upon his return to America, as he considered ‘there is every reason to hope that we can employ it.’<sup>31</sup>

Montgomery visited Mount Lyell on 26-27 February 1893 and observed the roasting trials performed by Peters. He praised the Mount Lyell owners for their enterprise and wisdom in obtaining the services of such a well-known and eminent authority on copper smelting. Montgomery was greatly impressed by Peters’ professional attitude. He commended him for the conservative and cautious approach he adopted in presenting the facts and for not being unduly influenced by speculative possibilities. Like Peters, Montgomery was highly enthusiastic at the prospect of using pyritic smelting. He considered that ‘should the process of pyritic smelting...become a commercial success – and there seems to be a very great likelihood of this being so – the Mount Lyell ore ought to be very easily smelted by it, almost without fuel at all.’<sup>32</sup>

Peters’ approach to the situation was justified for it was Sticht who later confirmed that ‘the reserve with which Dr. Peters speaks of this operation was due to the novelty of the process at the time.’<sup>33</sup> At the time of his taking the position in 1895, Sticht observed:

it is sufficiently clear that the earlier career of this newest and most interesting of all blast-furnace smelting methods was by no means a happy one. When the writer came to Mount Lyell in March, 1895, there was not a single plant in the United States running satisfactorily on the process in its purest form, and not one that promised an extended life. Scarcity of ore and metallurgical romance both interfered with the extension of its application.<sup>34</sup>

There is some conjecture as to the role Peters played in securing Robert Sticht’s services at Mount Lyell. Both Blainey and Davey credit William Knox with having

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<sup>30</sup> TRA Davey, Robert Sticht, *Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, Biographical Series No. 5, 1995. Davey has written the introduction to a reprint of the two presidential addresses delivered by Sticht in 1908 and 1915/16.

<sup>31</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3, including a Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, 1893, paper 50, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1895, p. 21, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>34</sup> R.Sticht, *Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Biographical Series* No. 5, 1995 Reprint of Sticht’s 1908 Presidential Address, compiled by TR Davey.

won Sticht's support. The *Zeehan & Dundas Herald* credited Peters with the task, advising that on Peters' return to America, and acting on the instructions of Bowes Kelly, he engaged Robert Sticht to work for the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>35</sup> Both explanations are plausible and it is possible that Peters had made contact with Sticht regarding the Mount Lyell ore and the possible application of pyritic smelting, because at the time Sticht was the foremost authority on pyritic smelting in the USA.<sup>36</sup>

### **The regime of Robert Sticht - Pyritic Smelting**

Robert Carl Sticht was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on 8 October 1856, to German-American parents. He had graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the Brooklyn Polytechnic in 1875, after which he specialised in metallurgy at the Royal School of Mines in Clausthal, Germany. Initially employed as a chief chemist and assistant metallurgist, Sticht's interests extended to experimentation in smelting techniques. In the fifteen years he spent working on the Colorado and Montana fields, he had developed the reputation as a leading authority on pyritic smelting in the United States of America.<sup>37</sup> This section looks at Sticht's innovative development of pyritic smelting and his role in the rise to dominance of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company, which would become the single largest industrial concern in Tasmania.

Sticht arrived in Strahan on 24 March 1895. After inspecting the Mount Lyell mining operations, he confidently predicted that his ambitions of perfecting the pyritic smelting process were attainable. Sticht noted the high content of gold and silver in the ore and its lack of contaminants, which he considered to be attractive properties to the buyers of blister copper. Buoyed by his observations, Sticht revealed to the *Mercury* that he was surprised at the vast scale of the Mount Lyell venture and the spirit of enterprise shown by its owners. He was bemused that the mine was more famous in the United States and Great Britain than it was in Tasmania. Sticht criticised the apparent disregard shown for the local industry, noting that 'in this colony mining seems to be much neglected, for from the prospects it ought to be pushed ahead with great vigor.'<sup>38</sup>

In his 8 April 1895 report to the Board of Directors, Sticht confirmed the enormity and favourable characteristics of the mineral deposit at Mount Lyell. He strongly recommended the adoption of pyritic smelting, advising the directors that the process would remove the need for the preliminary roasting as the high sulphur content in the

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<sup>35</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>36</sup> I McShane, 'Robert Carl Sticht (1856-1922)', *ADB*, v. 12, pp. 93-94.

<sup>37</sup> McShane, 'Robert Carl Sticht (1856-1922)', pp. 93-94.

<sup>38</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 April 1895.



**ROBERT STICH - MANAGER MOUNT LYELL 1897-1922**



**RUSSELL MURRAY – MANAGER MOUNT LYELL 1922-1944**

ore would serve as the chief fuel for its reduction into matte. Believing large scale smelting operations to be appropriate, Sticht advised the directors that he aimed to increase the daily smelting capacity from 500 to 1,000 tons of ore. To achieve this objective, Sticht requested that the Company purchase two largest available blast furnaces. He also required a converter plant and a reverberatory furnace, to melt the blister copper and cast it into ingots for export. A confident Sticht commented that 'the facilities for an immense revenue from this singular body of Copper Ore are not equalled anywhere at the present day, and I congratulate myself upon the appointment at your hands to the office which connects me with this Company.'<sup>39</sup>

The full terms of Sticht's engagement as Chief Metallurgist were not disclosed. Apparently the offer was conditional on his ability to erect the smelters and demonstrate the success of pyritic smelting within a period of twelve months. In accepting the contract, he expressed concerns that he should not be held responsible for any time lost due to heavy rainfalls or delays caused by the isolated and inaccessible nature of the smelters from the sea-board.<sup>40</sup> His salary was reported to be 'considerably higher than any yet paid to any mining man in Tasmania, or, in fact, very few parts of Australia.'<sup>41</sup> Upon the amalgamation of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company and the North Mount Lyell Copper Company, formalised in July 1903, Sticht accepted the job as General Manager of the new Company, for a period of five years, at an annual salary of £5,000 sterling. Responding to the offer, Sticht observed his terms of his employment to be similar to the 'previous form.'<sup>42</sup> The salary paid during his tenure as manager appears to have remained at much the same figure. His successor, Russell Mervyn Murray, who became General Manager following Sticht's death on 30 April 1922, did not enjoy the same level of remuneration. His salary, effective from 1 July 1924, was set at £3,500, while the Chief Metallurgist received £2,000.<sup>43</sup>

The natural resources available within the district afforded a considerable benefit to the Mount Lyell Company. The site selected by Peters for the smelting works was located amid the heavily wooded western slopes of Mount Lyell, overlooking the Queen River Valley. It was ideally suited for the treatment process as the buildings could be

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<sup>39</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1895, p. 20, Queenstown.

<sup>40</sup> R Sticht letter to the Board of Directors, 24 April 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 1, Non State Records (NS) 1711/309, p. 7, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>41</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>42</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 2 September 1903, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co. Ltd. Collection, File 5/2/1, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Minutes of meetings of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co. Ltd, 8 January 1925, Volume 11, File 2/3/11, p. 104, University of Melbourne Archives.

erected on a series of terraces that facilitated the gravity-fed handling of ore at its various processing stages. Located nearby were clay, limestone and silica deposits. Large numbers of bricks were required for the buildings, flues and chimneys, while the limestone and silica would be used at the ore processing stage. Also of strategic importance to the site was the availability of ample water supplies and government's granting of exclusive rights to all timber within the extensive forests about the Queen River Valley. Assured of an ample supply of fuel, timber and charcoal for a long period, Peters considered the concession to be 'hard to express in money, as it is simply indispensable.'<sup>44</sup>

Sticht's technical expertise came to the fore in his design of the plant and equipment installed at the new smelters. By October 1895 considerable progress had been achieved at the works site. Some inevitable delays had occurred through the late arrival of some overseas machinery and difficulties in landing cargoes at Strahan. Transport was also a problem. Prior to the completion of the railway all goods had to be hauled by sled over the poorly constructed dray route from Strahan. Sticht expressed confidence in the abilities of his technical support staff, but he was far from impressed with the local climate. In 1895 the rainfall totalled 144 inches, causing him to blame some delays on 'the extreme rainfall of the Tasmanian West Coast, which constitutes a formidable obstacle to rapidity of progress in outdoor labors and necessitates constructional problems usually not needed.'<sup>45</sup>

Sticht was aware of the directors' eagerness to commence smelting operations. Activity in and around the smelters site escalated in the early months of 1896, with Sticht reporting that the smelting plant, consisting of two large blast furnaces and accessories, was nearly operational. The construction of the Converter Plant was delayed by the late arrival of machinery from the United States. Movement of material about the district had been facilitated by the installation of a number of innovative transport systems. A self-acting haulage was erected to carry the ore from the Mount Lyell mine, on the eastern slopes of Mount Lyell, over the intervening spur, to link with a connecting tramway that ran through to the smelters' work site. A number of narrow gauge, steam hauled, tramways were laid in and about the new buildings and to the

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<sup>44</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, p. 32, Queenstown.

adjacent quarries and forests, to improve the cartage of apparatus, goods, firewood, ore, limestone and silica.<sup>46</sup>

Coming into June 1896, after thirteen years of trial and error, the potential of the Mount Lyell mine was ready to be tapped. Under Sticht's direction, the transformation of the Lyell District had been remarkable. The extraordinarily busy activity about the Lyell hills drew the following colourful description from George Meudell,<sup>47</sup> a friend of William Knox and correspondent for the *Melbourne Herald*:

There is no such scene of industrial activity anywhere else in Australasia. Four hundred men are delving, and cutting, and chopping at the huge hill sides, making a bed for the rails and sleepers, and they work unconcernedly with an apparently [sic] deadly hatred of the surrounding beauty. Fern-tree gullies are ruthlessly destroyed, small creeks choked with spoil, lovely glades disappear before the axes of the finest axemen on earth...The place is alive, busy, restless, energetic, the 300 men working round the smelters barely represent the hundreds of charcoal burners, wood cutters, waggoners, and laborers of every description employed in the neighboring forests for the benefit of this great enterprise.<sup>48</sup>

According to Blainey, there was a nervous, hushed atmosphere as Sticht lit the first furnace at the Reduction Works on the evening of 25 June 1896.<sup>49</sup> Careful preparations had been made during the preceding month. Ore deliveries, carried via the haulage to the orebins, commenced on 23 April. Supplies of fluxes and 150 tons of coke had been stockpiled onsite for the occasion. At 12 o'clock midnight the furnace was tapped, the molten slag was discharged and shortly afterwards the copper matte was poured into the waiting trucks. The significance of the occasion was not missed by the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, which reported the successful pyritic smelting as one of the most important events in the history of the West Coast. The meticulous planning by Sticht and his officers ensured the exercise passed without the slightest hitch. Congratulatory messages were accorded Sticht from those present.<sup>50</sup> A relieved Sticht reported to his directors that 'the operations of the furnace and the balance of the plant, as well as the special method of metallurgical treatment of the ore, must be pronounced entirely successful and satisfactory and the suitability of "pyritic smelting" to the Mount Lyell ore is fully demonstrated.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1896, pp. 17-26, Queenstown.

<sup>47</sup> D Langmore, 'George Dick Meudell (1860-1936)', *ADB*, v. 10, pp. 490-491. Meudell travelled to England with Knox in 1895 in an attempt to raise money on behalf of the Mount Lyell Railway Company.

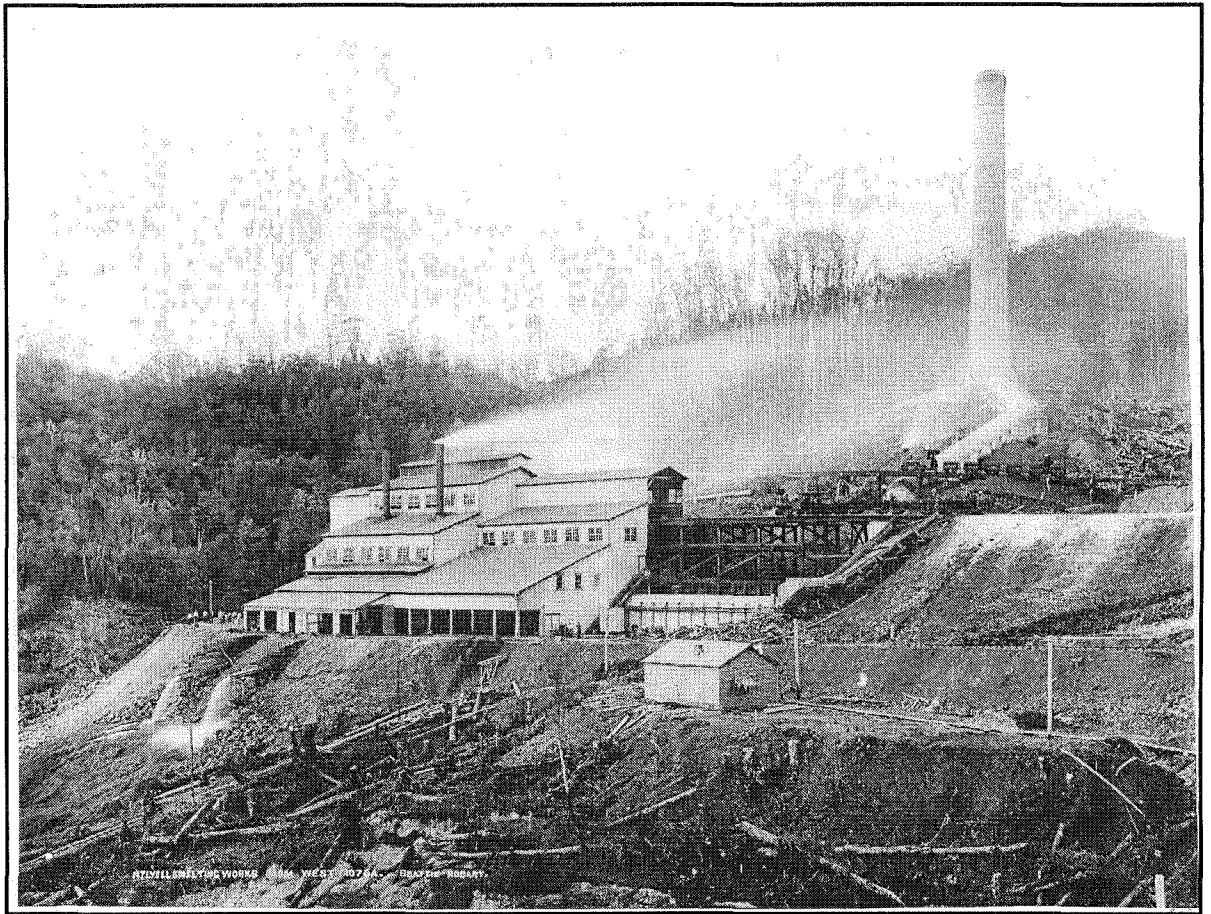
<sup>48</sup> *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 28 March 1896.

<sup>49</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 76.

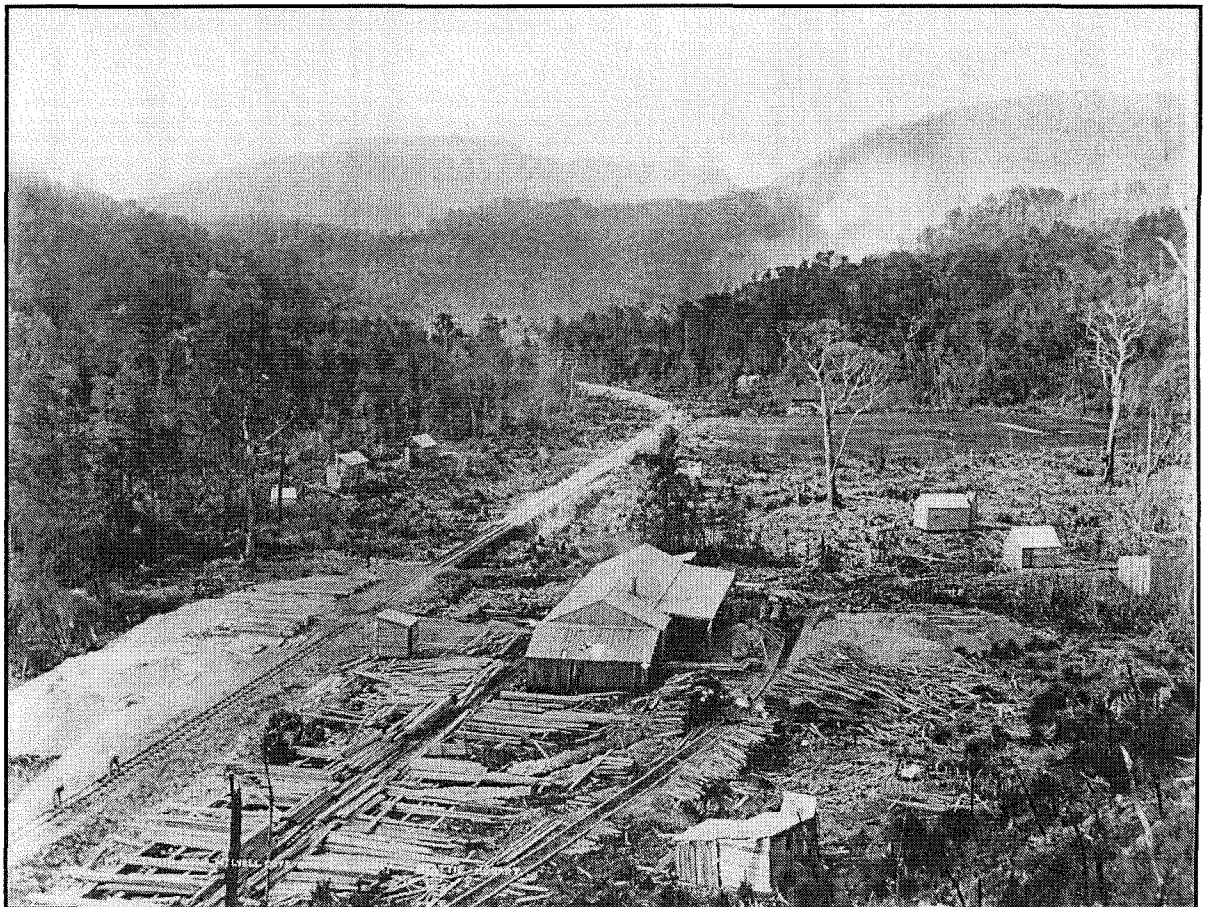
<sup>50</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 June 1896.

<sup>51</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1896, pp. 24-25, Queenstown.





**MOUNT LYELL SMELTERS – c. 1896**



**MOUNT LYELL SAWMILL AND RECREATION GROUND – c. 1896**

Sticht's pyritic smelting method utilised the oxidation of the iron sulphide in the copper ore to provide most of the heat required for fusion, the object being to produce a high-grade matte from low grade sulphide ores, without having to first roast them. The advantages of the process were the low costs brought about by savings on coke and coal and the retention of the silver and gold in the matte.<sup>52</sup> The first matte produced at the reduction works contained about 25 per cent copper.<sup>53</sup> Following experimentation with the different types of ore, Sticht was able to vary the concentrations of copper in the matte. He considered the 'principal objective in the furnace work is the achieving of a good grade of converter matte (45-50% Cu).'<sup>54</sup> The matte was then transferred to the Converter Plant where it was re-heated and purified, the typical composition of the end product, the blister copper, comprised copper 98.8%, silver 0.15%, gold 0.01% and 1% other constituents.<sup>55</sup> Sticht did not rest on his laurels. He continued to improve the process, particularly after he gained access to the ore from the nearby North Mount Lyell mine. The ores from the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell mines proved ideal for smelting together, having the right mixture of pyrites and silica. Sticht not only experimented with the ore mixes and the purity of the matte, he also changed the process from a hot blast at moderate pressure in the furnaces to that of a cold blast at high pressure.<sup>56</sup>

Sticht did not rush to commission the second furnace, preferring to await the completion of the railway into Queenstown on 18 July 1896, and other necessary works, before accomplishing the task on 6 October the same year. Sticht was meticulous by nature and preferred to progress in an orderly and systematic fashion. He maintained long hours at work, particularly during the early years of the smelting operations. Blainey credits Sticht with possessing great energy and a zeal for work and, while supervising the firing of the converters, 'he worked until he fell asleep on the earthen floor through utter exhaustion, to be awakened later by a shower of sparks that singed his clothes.'<sup>57</sup> Sticht was considered to be 'of a modest, retiring disposition, and

<sup>52</sup> W Gowland, *The Metallurgy of the Non-Ferrous Metals*, London, Charles Griffin and Company Limited, undated, c. 1910, pp. 112-116.

<sup>53</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>54</sup> R Sticht, *The Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Biographical Series No. 5*, 1995 reprint of Sticht's 1915/16 Presidential Address, compiled by TR Davey.

<sup>55</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1897, p. 22, Queenstown.

<sup>56</sup> R Sticht, *The Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Biographical Series No. 5*, 1995 reprint of Sticht's 1908 Presidential Address compiled by TR Davey.

<sup>57</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 262.

possessing unvarying courtesy of demeanor and a genial urbanity of manner which has gained him the enduring goodwill and esteem of all sorts and conditions of men.’<sup>58</sup>

Sticht required the men to undertake preparatory training to avoid costly accidents. The first furnace in the Converter Plant was successfully put into blast on 14 January 1897, with the second commissioned on 19 April the same year. The first commercial shipment of copper ingots (pig-copper) left the works on 5 February 1897. By 30 April 1897 the whole plant had moved to continuous production. The smelters treated 500 tons of ore daily, and the converters produced 22 to 25 tons of copper. As originally predicted by Sticht, the blister copper ingots proved to be remarkably pure. The Mount Lyell “brand” drew large enquiry, the copper fetching high prices. Instilled with confidence, the directors endorsed a dividend of four shillings, payable to shareholders on 1 July 1897.<sup>59</sup>

The early financial position of the Company had been far from secure. Early attempts to raise finance had been thwarted by a combination of factors - English investors could not be attracted, mineral prices had temporarily slumped and the Tasmanian Government had refused to guarantee the Company’s debentures. The saving grace for the Company had been the fortuitous discovery of a rich seam of silver in the Number 4 Tunnel, in the North Drive, at the Mount Lyell mine. From the 849 tons of ore mined between 20 May 1893 and 28 July 1895, some 858,915oz of silver and 176 tons of copper were recovered. The net profit amounted to £106,325 10s. 7d.<sup>60</sup> This significant windfall saved the Company, financing its railway and smelter works. At the 20 March 1897 official banquet held at the Palace Hotel in Strahan to commemorate the opening of the works, Bowes Kelly expressed great pride in the accomplishments of the young Company. The capital sums outlaid on the railway (£129,952), the mine (£80,000), the smelters (£130,543) and sundry items (£45,400), had approximated to £386,000. Optimism prevailed, and the existing workforce of 985 employees was expected to grow to between 3,000 and 4,000 once the ten furnaces were up and running.<sup>61</sup>

The opening celebrations provided a forum for Messers Kelly, Knox and Jamieson to reflect on the immensity of the project and the many difficulties encountered. Kelly noted the differences in the Mount Lyell operation when compared to the two other mines with which he was associated. The Broken Hill development had

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<sup>58</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>59</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1897, p. 13, Queenstown.

<sup>60</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

been easily accessed, and did not endure the rugged country, the almost impenetrable scrub and the seemingly incessant rainfall. At Mount Morgan the works had been far easier and dividends had been paid within twelve months of commencing mining. William Knox considered the West Coast had given three object lessons to Australasia. These included the introduction of the Abt System of railway, the establishment of pyritic smelting and, finally, the successful employment of a 2 feet narrow gauge tramway system within the mountainous country. William Jamieson paid tribute to Robert Sticht, stating he 'came out here with the avowed intention of showing us how to do pyritic smelting, and he fulfilled his mission. A great many pessimists said it could not be done, but Mr Sticht said he came here to do that and nothing else. He carried out his promise triumphantly to the satisfaction of everyone.'<sup>62</sup>

The District Surveyor for Montagu, C. Selby Wilson, praised those leading the Mount Lyell Company to success. He expressed a hope 'for the welfare of mining generally, that the downright pluck displayed by this Company will act as an impetus to legitimate mining, and as an aperient to locked-up capital.'<sup>63</sup> Sticht's benchmark achievements gained world-wide recognition, and were considered the major reason behind the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's rise to one of the world's great copper mining empires. Within the Mount Lyell field he was revered. He had the ability to generate enthusiasm and derive loyalty from those he worked with. Sticht was credited with having built up a workforce probably unequalled in Australia for its skills, loyalty and pride of achievement.<sup>64</sup>

Sticht was to also become embroiled in the internal machinations of the Company, particularly in the long-standing feud between Bowes Kelly and James Crotty. Much of the fracas had stemmed from the terms of Kelly's original purchase of the controlling interest of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company, No Liability. Crotty deeply resented the way in which Kelly had bartered down the original price paid for the mine and his subsequent rise to dominate the new Company. As a miner, Crotty had a long-term association with the West Coast, particularly with the Iron Blow. He was 'an eloquent, excitable man-about-town.'<sup>65</sup> He spent much time and effort criticising Kelly and the Company's activities. Crotty had challenged the sale of debentures in the Supreme Court of Victoria and had mounted an unsuccessful campaign to become a

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<sup>61</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 March 1897.

<sup>62</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 March 1897.

<sup>63</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1896, 1897, paper 48, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> K Pink, *The Tasmanian West Coast Story*, Burnie, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, 1984, pp. 74-75.

director in November 1896.<sup>66</sup> At the 27 November 1896 shareholders' meeting, Crotty accused Kelly and his fellow directors of misappropriating 608 tons of rich ore. In a written response to Crotty's allegation, Sticht advised Kelly that the 608 tons was a mere invention by Crotty and that even the accidental omission of even a trifling weight of ore was an absolute impossibility. Sticht informed Kelly that the days of the eight-head gold battery were over and the Company 'has nothing to fear from the utmost publicity in the technical management of its affairs.'<sup>67</sup>

Blainey describes the quarrel between Crotty and Kelly as the 'costliest feud in Australian mining.'<sup>68</sup> Unable to match Kelly on home territory, Crotty took his battle off-shore. Early in 1897, he sailed for England. In London Crotty associated with influential media and mining investors. From here he was able to continue his vendetta and promote the fortunes of his North Mount Lyell and South Mount Lyell leases, located close to the Mount Lyell mine. By September 1897 Crotty had raised sufficient capital to register the North Mount Lyell Copper Company. He aspired to build a railway, wharves and smelters to service the Mount Lyell field and challenge the operations of the Mount Lyell Company. Adding momentum to his plans was the 20 October 1897 discovery of large deposits of the copper-rich bornite ore by road workers blasting on his North Mount Lyell lease.<sup>69</sup> The timely find proved to be the richest copper deposit yet found in Tasmania. It would eventually yield three times the amount of copper recovered from the Mount Lyell mine. Crotty influenced the press to extol the virtues of his North Mount Lyell enterprise, at the expense of Kelly and the Mount Lyell Company. He provided one sided and often incorrect information to the British mining journals and was able to manipulate articles printed in the locally produced *Mount Lyell Standard* to further his aims and deride his foes.<sup>70</sup>

As Crotty waged his war of words from abroad, the loyalty of the local communities became divided. At the time many of the North Mount Lyell miners lived in the towns of Gormanston and North Lyell, whereas Queenstown was predominantly a Mount Lyell Company smelter's town. The rift caused by the clash of the two mining entities would cause many later problems for Robert Sticht, who had been appointed

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<sup>65</sup> G Blainey, 'James Crotty (1845?-1898)', *ADB*, v. 8, p. 160.

<sup>66</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 102-104.

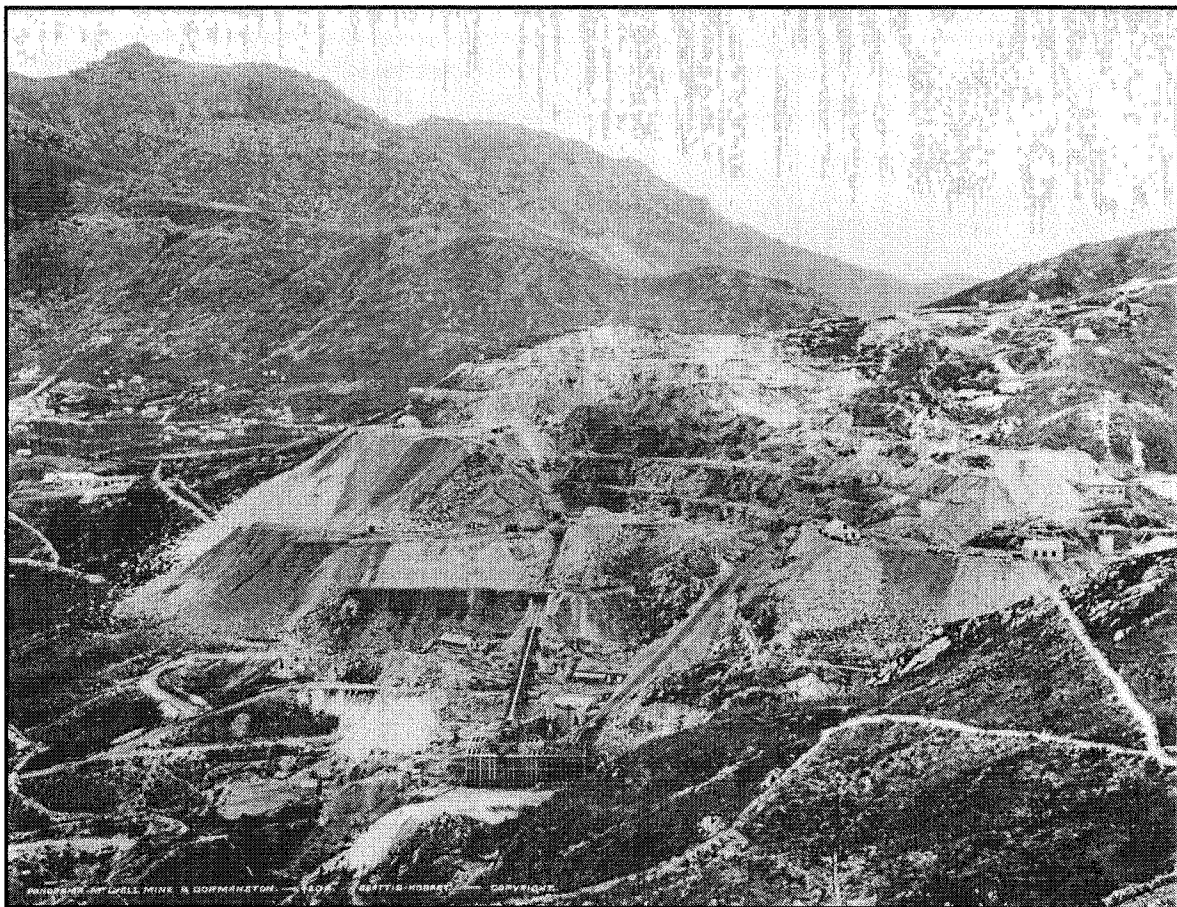
<sup>67</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 5 December 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 3, NS 1711/311, pp. 191-192, AOT.

<sup>68</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 102.

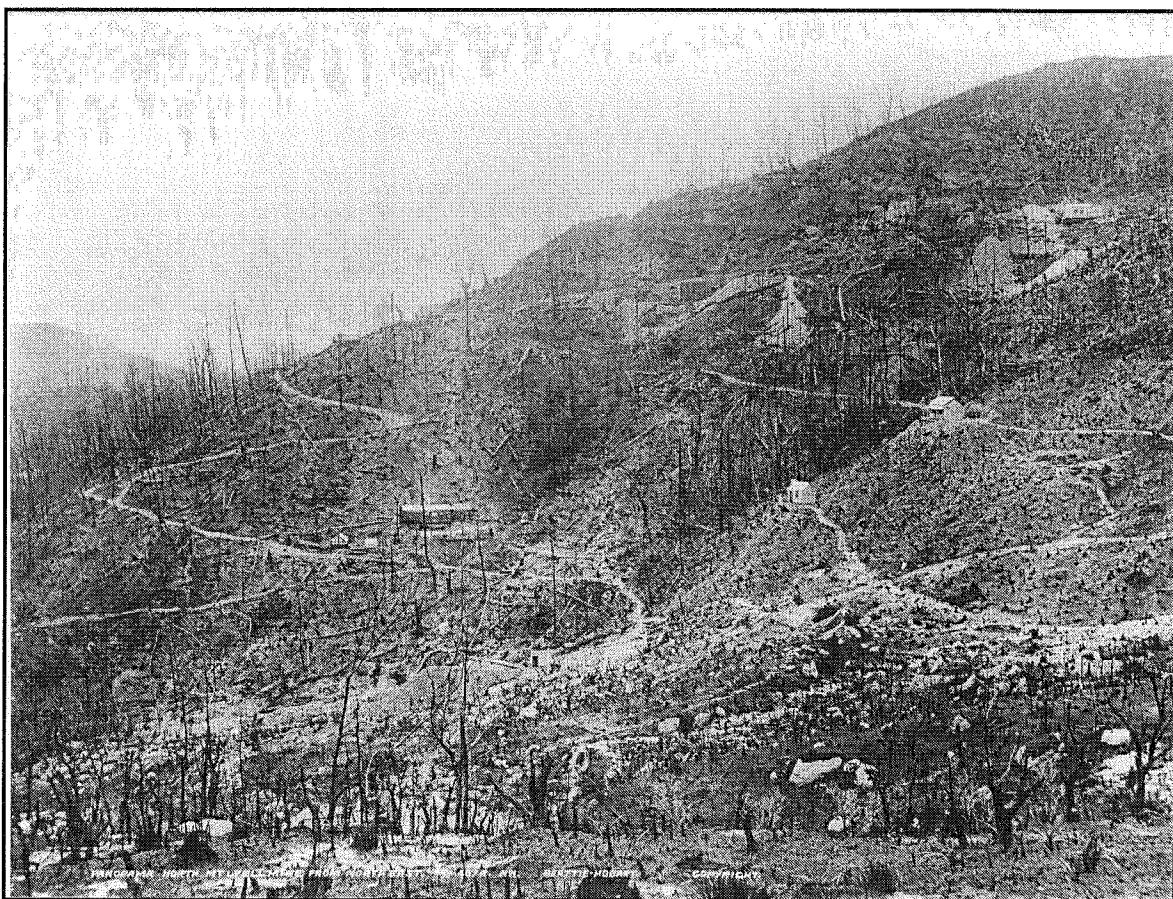
<sup>69</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 October 1897.

<sup>70</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 104-111.





**MOUNT LYELL MINE (IRON BLOW) – c. 1902**



**NORTH MOUNT LYELL AREA – c. 1898**

General Manager of the Mount Lyell Company, in September 1897.<sup>71</sup> It was Sticht's responsibility to protect the Company's interests and to meet the very real challenges mounted by the North Mount Lyell operatives. The latter Company's strong capital backing, superior copper ores and aggressive management, which openly professed its intention to dominate the mining field, made it a worthy opponent in the battle to dominate the copper field. The next six years would prove a stern test for Sticht. Causing him great frustration was the ongoing anti-Mount Lyell stance adopted by the Queenstown published paper, the *Mount Lyell Standard*. He was eager to confront the paper head-on, but wisely avoided all verbal and written contact as he was fully aware of the implications of an errant remark made to a hostile press.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Sticht did take action against the *Standard* by withdrawing the provision of information and advertising revenue from the paper.<sup>73</sup>

On one occasion the editor of the *Standard* visited the Company's offices and demanded an interview with Sticht. This act of sheer impudence ruffled Sticht's normally dignified manner and, as a consequence, the editor was 'forcibly turned out' of the Company's offices. Explaining his out of character action to his directors, Sticht advised that he bore no malice to the harmless individual. He had 'considered this peculiar step necessary owing to the impossibility of defining to the owners of the paper my actual personal resentment of the attitude of this paper of late towards the Company at large and its individual officers.'<sup>74</sup> Sticht had been unable to determine who was behind the paper's stance, although he had ascertained from its former editor, William Taylour, that the owners 'appeared to have sold themselves body and soul to the "North" crowd.'<sup>75</sup> Taylour had resigned his job as editor following the publishing of a leading article, in defiance of his wishes, that had maligned Bowes Kelly, and had also attempted to create a rift between Sticht and Kelly.<sup>76</sup>

Sticht's frustrations were understandable. As a manager, he expected to make decisions, fix problems and manage. The fact the *Standard's* policies were being directed by unknown outside interests, made it impossible for Sticht to rectify the

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<sup>71</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1897, p. 10, Queenstown.

<sup>72</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 4 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, p. 765, AOT.

<sup>73</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 3 January 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, p. 917, AOT.

<sup>74</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 12 January 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, p. 964, AOT.

<sup>75</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 19 January 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 6, NS 1711/314, p. 7, AOT.

<sup>76</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 December 1897.

situation. The proponents of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company manipulated the physical isolation of Mount Lyell, from the rest of the world, to their great advantage. The slow response times taken to rebut mischievous articles back in London gave sufficient time for the rumours to spread unabated. From his London office, James Crotty sought to educate the public, spending thousands of pounds of his own money publishing and distributing literature on his North Mount Lyell mine. Having manipulated the tenor of the articles in the *Mount Lyell Standard*, he was then able to produce them as authenticated accounts to unwary investors. On one occasion the *British Australasian*, which was respected for its information on Australian affairs, published a biased report penned by a Lieutenant-Colonel Tudor-Boddam, a retired captain of the Hobart shore batteries. Tudor-Boddam, in his 2 December 1897 article, embellished the worth of the proposed North Mount Lyell enterprise and derided the Mount Lyell operations. Similar utterances, as outlined on page 255 of this thesis, were also published in London's *Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*.<sup>77</sup>

Crotty's tactics proved successful. Sufficient capital was raised to finance his lavish plans for the North Mount Lyell Company. Sticht, on the other hand, remained frustrated. Unable to directly refute Tudor-Boddam's allegations, he was left to pen a thirty-page response to his directors, attacking the 'promulgators of this information' supplied to the *British Australasian*.<sup>78</sup> Crotty did not live to see his enterprise flourish, dying from gastritis in London on 16 April 1898. He had become a conspicuous figure in London mining circles and was acknowledged as the driving force behind the North Mount Lyell Company. Crotty was 'a hardworking man, extremely tenacious of his opinion, generous to a fault, and a warm friend, though stubborn enemy.'<sup>79</sup>

Around the time of Crotty's death the North Mount Lyell Company faced temporary financial problems, caused by the considerable capital outlay spent on its smelting operations, railway, wharf and mine improvements. Seeking to redress the situation, the Company's unwary directors entered into short-term contracts to sell its rich ore to the Mount Lyell Company. A canny Sticht had been waiting for this opportunity. Just two days after the announcement of Crotty's death, he observed that the possibility now existed for the Mount Lyell Company to effect business 'on terms which it would be possible for us to make fairly advantageous to ourselves.'<sup>80</sup> Without

<sup>77</sup> *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 13 November 1897.

<sup>78</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 1 February 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 6, NS 1711/314, pp. 37-66, AOT.

<sup>79</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 April 1898.

<sup>80</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 22 April 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 6, NS 1711/314, p. 222, AOT.



Crotty's local knowledge, the London Board lost its rein on proceedings. The Company's local based Melbourne Board was left to its own devices. Claims of incompetence and extravagant spending abounded, and examples of inefficient and improper practices were evident on most works sites. Upon visiting the Mount Lyell field in 1900, London directors, DJ Mackay and JS MacArthur, both expressed confidence in the railway works and the worth of the ore on show at the North Mount Lyell mine. MacArthur, a metallurgist by trade, inspected the various mines controlled by the North Mount Lyell Company and confidently predicted the erection of twelve furnaces in the proposed smelting complex.<sup>81</sup>

The decision to locate the smelters at Crotty, sited on the banks of the King River, immediately to the eastern end of the gorge, appeared to be fortuitous. The site was conveniently located to the emerging Jukes-Darwin Mining field, the site of several promising finds of copper during 1897.<sup>82</sup> Unlike the Mount Lyell Company, the North Mount Lyell directors did not do their homework on the smelting properties of their copper ores, nor did they pay sufficient attention to the highly successful pyritic smelting operations developed by Sticht. Instead, MacArthur recommended the erection of reverberatory furnaces. He employed an American, Lamartine Cavaignac Trent, as metallurgist, on a salary of £2,000 per year to undertake the task. Trent neither possessed Sticht's scientific background nor his experience in smelting techniques. He had, however, gained some skills in the design of reduction works.<sup>83</sup>

Construction work on the Crotty furnaces had commenced by May 1901, the Company's aim being to build two nests each of four furnaces, capable of treating two thousand tons per day. This was twice the amount being handled by the Mount Lyell Company. The first furnace was completed for testing towards the end of September 1901. Within days rumours of its failure circulated about the district.<sup>84</sup> The North Mount Lyell Company erected four reverberatory furnaces but none worked successfully. Once a strong advocate of the Company's activities, the *Mount Lyell Standard* switched its allegiances and became a harsh critic. It reported 'the mine is one of quite phenomenal richness, and that it is not paying dividends to-day is due to mismanagement almost as phenomenal.'<sup>85</sup> Trent's attempts to conceal the smelting failures backfired. The *Standard's* ongoing criticism of his activities duly saw it

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<sup>81</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 May 1900.

<sup>82</sup> Despite ongoing exploration of the Mounts Jukes and Darwin districts, only small amounts of copper and alluvial gold were found. The geology of the area is described in the report by L Hills, *The Jukes-Darwin Mining Field*, Geological Survey Bulletin No. 16, Department of Mines, Hobart, 1914.

<sup>83</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 132.

<sup>84</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 30 September 1901.

banished a second time, this time by the North Mount Lyell Company.<sup>86</sup> The abject failure of the Crotty smelters necessitated a second visit by the London directors during the final days of April 1902. Swift action was required to lift the Company's fortunes. Orders were immediately issued to demolish the furnaces, Trent and several of his cohorts were sacked and new plans were prepared to erect blast furnaces, with an aim of replicating the process made famous by Sticht.<sup>87</sup>

### **Sticht – Perfection and Domination**

Unlike the Crotty fiasco, Sticht's pyritic process was a resounding success. By September 1899 the Mount Lyell Company's daily smelting capacity had been increased to 1,000 tons of ore. Eleven furnaces were in fulltime operation and a second converter plant had been erected.<sup>88</sup> The Company's shareholders had good reason to be satisfied with Sticht. A total of £883,136 19s. 8d. had been paid in dividends between 1 July 1897 and 30 September 1902. The inevitable comparisons between the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell operations revealed important differences. The North Mount Lyell Company was favoured by a superior grade of copper ore but suffered from a poor management regime and inappropriate smelting techniques. The Mount Lyell Company enjoyed a superior management team and possessed efficient smelters, but the average copper content in its ore had fallen from 4.4% to 2.36% since commencing smelting.<sup>89</sup>

The substantial reduction in the copper content had reduced the viability of the Mount Lyell Company's operations, the major cost being the need to smelt large volumes of barren silica rock as a flux in the treatment process. The composition and nature of the copper ores varied considerably about the Mount Lyell field. By comparison, the North Mount Lyell ore was rich in both copper and silica. Sticht was well aware that the life of the Mount Lyell mine could be extended if the ore was blended with the siliceous ore obtained from the North Mount Lyell mine. This fact explained Sticht's eagerness to access the North Lyell ore following Crotty's death. Sticht sought to prolong the life of the Mount Lyell mine by securing silica rich copper ore from other mines, the first such agreement for 25,000 tons being signed in 1898

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<sup>85</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 30 November 1901.

<sup>86</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 December 1901.

<sup>87</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 May 1902.

<sup>88</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1899, p. 7, Queenstown.

<sup>89</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-yearly periods for 30/9/1897, 31/3/1898, 30/9/1898, 31/3/1899, 30/9/1899, 31/3/1900, 30/9/1900, 31/3/1901, 30/9/1901, 31/3/1902 and 30/9/1902, Queenstown.



with the Lyell Tharsis Mining Company No liability. The smelting of the combined ores proved successful. Sticht advised his directors that the Lyell Tharsis ore was 'found suitable and yields satisfactory results as a flux for our own ore and acts as a profitable substitute for a portion of the barren flux now being specially quarried.'<sup>90</sup>

During 1899 the Company entered new contracts with the King Lyell Gold and Copper Company No Liability and, importantly, the North Mount Lyell Copper Company. Over the next few years additional agreements were also signed with the South Tharsis Mining Company (1899/1900) and the Mount Lyell Blocks Company (1900/1901). Access to the different ores during the period 1898-1902, particularly those from the North Mount Lyell mine, provided Sticht with valuable opportunities to experiment and refine his pyritic smelting process. Realising the importance of the surrounding mines to its long-term viability, the Company embarked on an ambitious expansion program. It duly acquired the South Tharsis (1900), Royal Tharsis (1900/01), King Lyell (1900/01), Mount Lyell Reserve Copper and Gold Mines No Liability (1901/02), Glen Lyell Copper Mining Company No Liability (1901/02), North Crown Lyell Company (1902) and the Central Lyell Company (1902) mining operations during its purchasing spree.<sup>91</sup>

The deal securing the supply of the North Mount Lyell ore proved crucial to the long-term survival prospects of the Mount Lyell Company. Sticht's experiments with the ore enabled him to perfect the pyritic smelting process. His tests confirmed that the best smelting results were obtained from mixing the silica-rich North Mount Lyell copper ore with the pyritic ore obtained from the Mount Lyell mine. At the time, Lamartine Trent had been far from impressed with the terms for the sale of the North Mount Lyell ore. He realised that the commitment to send 50,000 tons of 6% copper ore to a rival company, that had been previously compelled to mine barren silica as a flux, made little sense. Trent observed 'the contract with the Mount Lyell Company is the great stumbling block, and if this had been made by an escaped lunatic it would not have been less to our advantage or less fair...at present we are mining ore to increase our neighbour's dividends.'<sup>92</sup>

Trent's outburst coincided with the failure of his Crotty smelters. During this period Trent was criticised for spreading misinformation and fabricating cover-ups

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<sup>90</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1899, p. 10, Queenstown.

<sup>91</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-yearly periods ending 30/9/1898, 31/3/1899, 30/9/1899, 31/3/1900, 30/9/1900, 31/3/1901, 30/9/1901, 31/3/1902 and 30/9/1902, Queenstown.

<sup>92</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 February 1902.

concerning his unsuccessful smelting trials. A short time prior to his May 1902 sacking, a bitter and hostile Trent briefed the Mount Lyell Company's Engineer, WT Batchelor, offering-up trade secrets and advising him that 'it would be foolish for the M.L. Co. to relax their superior hold on the situation.'<sup>93</sup> Upon Trent's departure, the North Mount Lyell Company acceded to the use of the pyritic smelting process to treat its ore. The decision was taken to erect the blast furnaces at Crotty, the first of four finally commencing operation in September 1902. The pyritic flux was accessed from the Company's South Lyell Mine, located adjacent to the Mount Lyell mine. Initial smelting results proved extremely promising, instilling a new-found confidence in all branches of the Company.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the success of the Crotty smelters, speculation continued to increase on the likely amalgamation of the two companies. The economic and practical rationale supporting a joint venture had been mooted by outside observers for some time but a combination of factors had prevented the merger. Crotty's much vaunted hatred of the Mount Lyell Board persisted within the existing management structure, creating an intense rivalry between the two companies and had preventing fruitful dialogue. In Britain the benefits of amalgamation had been obvious. In September 1900 a correspondent writing for the London based *Economist* had observed:

I think a grave economic mistake is been [sic] made by the North Lyell in erecting it [sic] own smelter. The Mount Lyell Company is crying out for silicious ore for fluxing purposes, and it would pay that company to treat the whole of the ore that the North Lyell could produce at a lower charge than what the North Lyell will inevitably have to spend it if [sic] treats its own ore.<sup>95</sup>

Given the smelting advancements made at Crotty by late 1902, the chances of an amalgamation appeared remote to many the North Mount Lyell directors. These men were totally unaware that Company's financial adviser, Robert Nivison, had already entered into clandestine discussions with the Mount Lyell Company on the subject.<sup>96</sup>

Sticht played a critical role in the confidential merger negotiations, his involvement beginning in August 1902. During the months leading up to the May 1903 announcement, Sticht proved himself a very skilful tactician. Of major concern to Sticht were the dwindling ore reserves at the Mount Lyell mine, the supply soon to be reduced from 6,600 tons to 4,200 tons per week. He knew that, if the North Mount Lyell Company continued to strip its richest ore for processing, then its smelting outputs

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<sup>93</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 21 March 1902, General Manager's confidential letters, File 5/2/1, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>94</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 December 1902.

<sup>95</sup> As quoted in the *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 October 1900.

<sup>96</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 153.

could temporarily out-perform those of the Mount Lyell works, and prove most embarrassing to his Company. Sticht advised his directors to force the issue 'very quickly, while our output is still fair and does not fall still lower...and not give them [North Mount Lyell]...the opportunity to put off the inevitable by "hedging."'<sup>97</sup>

Sticht had calculated that profitable smelting at Mount Lyell would cease within 260 working days, whereas the proven North Mount Lyell ore reserves totalled 750 days, with a promise of further deposits still to be identified. Apart from the metallurgical advantages to be gained in the advent of the amalgamation, Sticht envisaged the smelting output could be expanded to 8,400 tons per week. The increased volume would reduce smelting costs per ton, improve existing operational efficiencies and enable the Company to cease the costly quarrying and smelting of the barren silica flux. Sticht believed the union of the two mines was appropriate. He advised his Board that amalgamation would assure the continuance of future operations 'and will give better chances of ultimate steady success and profit than could accrue from isolation.'<sup>98</sup>

The directors could ill-afford to ignore Sticht's advice. His knowledge and understanding of the Mount Lyell ore bodies and their smelting properties were second to none. In the coming months his skill as a metallurgist was to win even more renown. On 13 November 1902 he achieved the first truly successful pyritic smelting operation, by smelting the copper ore without the use of fuel. After having experimented with the various mixes of ores, Sticht had improved the operation of the furnaces by blowing in a blast of cold air, instead of the normal hot air. He then increased the pressure of the blast to a high degree. Although he had managed to eliminate the use of coke during these trials, he subsequently decided to introduce a mixture of 1% by volume of coke into the furnaces in order to provide some relief for the furnace workers during the intricate smelting operations. Sticht's improvements enabled the Company to reduce its annual consumption of coke from 15,300 to 6,300 tons.<sup>99</sup> Sticht received a congratulatory message for his endeavours from Alfred Mellor, the Company's Secretary, who advised Sticht: 'I am afraid that, when the information becomes known to the North Mt. Lyell Co., they will regard this achievement on your part as the unkindest cut of all.'<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 27 August 1902, General Manager's confidential letters, File 5/2/1, pp. 1-6, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>98</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 21 February 1903, General Manager's confidential letters, File 5/2/1, pp. 1-26, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>99</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 152.

Some were not thrilled by Sticht's achievements, particularly Edward Miles and the Marine Board of Strahan. Miles commented:

Strange though it may seem, the marvellous success of pyritic smelting at Mount Lyell, under the guidance of its "master mind" – while of enormous benefit to this country, inasmuch as it makes millions of tons of low grade ore workable which otherwise could not be worked – has materially decreased the Board's revenue. Thousands of people are living on the mighty brain of one man, the country is generally reaping the benefit, but the Board suffers loss in revenue because of the lesser quantity of fuel used.<sup>101</sup>

Sticht's ultimate success with his pyritic smelting operations had occurred at an opportune time in the amalgamation process. The North Mount Lyell Company's negotiator, William Rich, would have observed two contrasting operations and management regimes. The Mount Lyell concern was highly successful, whereas North Mount Lyell had little to show for its squandered capital investment of £1,250,000.<sup>102</sup> Rich supported the dismantling of the North Mount Lyell empire. Sticht played a principal role in the evaluation process. He cleverly manipulated the inspection of the Mount Lyell mine, masking the extent of the flagging orebody from Rich. At the same time he gained a firsthand appreciation of the extensive North Mount Lyell lode. This induced Sticht to advise his Board that substantial gains could be made through an amalgamation.<sup>103</sup> Sticht's advice was accepted. A Provisional Agreement was signed by the two Companies on 22 May 1903. Sticht was appointed as interim manager to oversee the control of both operations. Under the terms of the agreement, the name of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited was retained, the old Mount Lyell Company being wound up voluntarily on 10 August 1903 and the new Company duly incorporated the following day, 11 August 1903.<sup>104</sup>

The shareholders and directors openly attributed the Company's good fortune to Sticht. Under the final terms of amalgamation, he was appointed general manager of the new Company.<sup>105</sup> While Sticht's achievements had greatly contributed to the downfall of the North Mount Lyell empire, he was not held personally responsible. The prevailing opinion within the region was that Sticht would provide the amalgamated Company with much-needed stability through his leadership and expert technical skills. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* fully acknowledged Sticht's untiring efforts on behalf

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<sup>100</sup> A Mellor letter to R Sticht, 19 November 1902, Mount Lyell Correspondence, Non State records, AOT.

<sup>101</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 July 1903.

<sup>102</sup> Gregory, *The Mount Lyell Mining Field*, p. 24.

<sup>103</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 10 March 1903, General Manager's confidential letters, File 5/2/1, pp. 1-3, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>104</sup> Report to the Directors by A Mellor, Company Secretary, concerning the agreement dated 11 August 1903, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

of his Company and pondered what would have occurred had Sticht been in charge of the North Mount Lyell Company. It welcomed the end of the depression that had beset the region, hoping to see 'a return to bright sunshiny days of prosperity – not the wild hilarious days of boomtime, but of steady progress and sound trade.'<sup>106</sup> Without the amalgamation and Sticht's leadership, the whole of the Lyell district would have 'faded away to disappearing point, and that at the time would have been calamitous from a State standpoint.'<sup>107</sup>

Sticht's defining pinnacle of success had been his pioneering role in developing pyritic smelting using the Mount Lyell ores. A visiting Japanese mining expert to the Lyell Field in 1905 reported that Sticht's name was well known in Europe and Asia and his smelting system was 'the best, simplest, most economical and most practical he had ever seen.'<sup>108</sup> The 1905 Annual Report for the Zeehan School of Mines proclaimed the smelting plant at Mount Lyell to now 'represent the most perfect practice of its particular kind in vogue anywhere at the present.'<sup>109</sup> Sticht's ability was appropriately recognised amongst his peers and he was twice elected President of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, in 1905 and in 1915/16. His advice was keenly sought. On one occasion, just before World War 1, after battling a metallurgical problem that appeared to have baffled all the specialist consultants, the Mount Morgan Company sought advice from Sticht. His subsequent advice to scrap the Mount Morgan plant was immediately accepted.<sup>110</sup> The importance of the innovative practices developed by Sticht, in the treatment of the sulphur rich ores, ensured both he and the Mount Lyell Company's operations remained topical in world mining circles for decades to come.<sup>111</sup>

### **Innovative Practices**

Under Sticht's management regime, the Company enhanced its existing operations and expanded its processing activities through the development of its own hydro-electric power scheme. The power station was sited five miles to the north of the reduction works, on the banks of the Yolande River. The Lake Margaret storage dam was located on Mount Sedgewick, 2,168' above sea level and 1,600' above the Mount Lyell works. Rainfall at the lake averaged 147 inches per annum, about 40 inches above

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<sup>105</sup> *Australian Mining Standard*, 23 July 1903.

<sup>106</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 May 1903.

<sup>107</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 May 1922.

<sup>108</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 May 1905.

<sup>109</sup> Zeehan School of Mines and Metallurgy, *Annual Report 1905*, Zeehan, 1906, pp. 57-69.

<sup>110</sup> J Kerr, *Mt Morgan: Gold, Copper and Oil*, St. Lucia, JD and RS Kerr, 1982, p. 130.



that recorded in Queenstown. The power was transmitted from the power station to a substation at the works, where it was transformed to the desired voltages and distributed to the mines, the processing plants and, eventually, to the towns about the district.<sup>112</sup> This section looks at the benefits endowed on the Company by its power scheme, including the development of the flotation ore-treatment process that would rely on the supply of a large supply of cheap power.

The Mount Lyell Company exercised its water rights at Lake Margaret during 1912 to generate electricity. Its decision to proceed with the works had followed assurances by Sticht that ten years of ore reserves were in sight and that an estimated annual savings of £50,000 could be achieved by converting from steam power to electricity.<sup>113</sup> Edward Peters originally advocated the use of water-generated power in his 1893 report to the Company,<sup>114</sup> the source of the water supply being identified by T Alexander Allan.<sup>115</sup> In 1896, Sticht contemplated the use of waterpower. It was to be channelled from Lake Margaret to Mount Lyell, and used to drive the machinery and to generate electricity to power the refinery. This option did not eventuate as the technology for electrifying the furnace operations was still in its infancy.<sup>116</sup> Work on the Lake Margaret scheme commenced in June 1912, access to the remote site being provided by the extension of the existing narrow gauge firewood tramway from Howard's Plains. The power station was built of concrete and housed four turbines. The changeover from steam power to waterpower was made during the last days of November 1914. The scheme cost £164,353.<sup>117</sup>

The Lake Margaret power station was not the first to be built on the West Coast. That honour went to the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company, which commenced the construction of its plant on the Waratah River in 1905.<sup>118</sup> Other power stations were built at Renison Bell (no date), on the Argent River, at Magnet in 1916 by the Magnet

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<sup>111</sup> Gowland, *The Metallurgy of the Non-Ferrous Metals*, pp. 112-116.

<sup>112</sup> Lake Margaret had an area of 404 acres, a storage capacity of 500,000,000 cubic feet and a catchment area of eight square miles. Technical details of the power scheme are provided in a Company produced booklet titled *Copper Mining at Mount Lyell*, printed c. 1941, pp. 24-26, Mount Lyell records, Queenstown.

<sup>113</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 February 1912, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pp. 1-3, AOT.

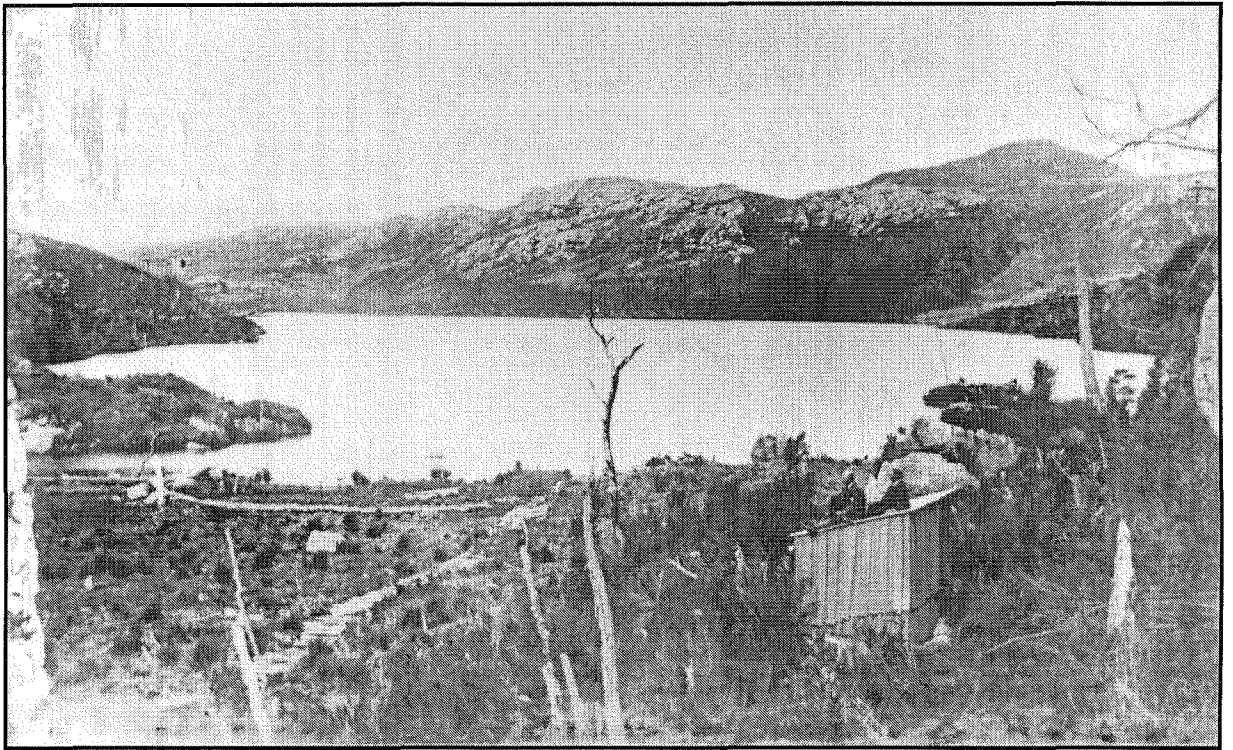
<sup>114</sup> ED Peters report 15 May 1893, pp. 26-27.

<sup>115</sup> TA Allan, Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, 9 May 1893, p. 36, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

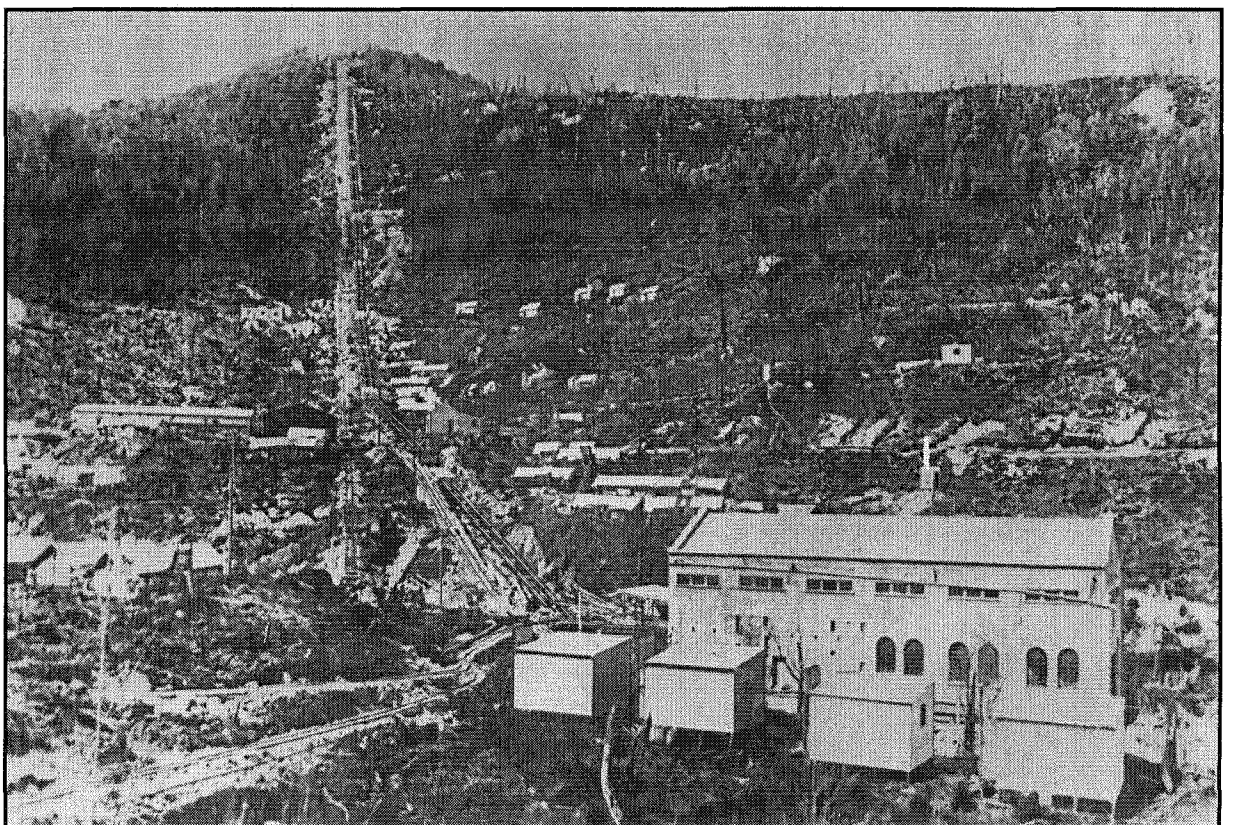
<sup>116</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 15 October 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, pp. 888-892, AOT.

<sup>117</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1915, Queenstown.

<sup>118</sup> Murchie et al, *A Century of Tin Mining at Mount Bischoff*, pp.47-48.



LAKE MARGARET – c. 1914



LAKE MARGARET POWER STATION – c. 1914

Silver Mining Company<sup>119</sup> and at Lake Cumberland, near Zeehan, in 1935.<sup>120</sup> A number of smaller power plants were utilised on the West Coast mining fields, where ample supplies of water were readily available. Simple systems were employed to generate electricity for lighting purposes and comprised dynamos powered by water-driven Pelton wheels. The Lake Margaret operation was the first large-scale commercial scheme. It generated sufficient power to meet all the Company's needs and eventually supplied town lighting and power to the towns about the Lyell region, to Zeehan and further afield. Commissioned in November 1914, 5,000 horsepower was generated daily. This was increased to 8,000 horsepower in 1920, following the raising of the Lake Margaret dam wall.<sup>121</sup>

The demand for electricity had increased substantially by 1929, due to an expansion in the Company's operations and its agreement with the Tasmanian Government to supply up to 3,000 horsepower for use elsewhere on the West Coast. Tenders for the construction of the second power station, a mile downstream from the existing station, were called in the summer of 1929-30.<sup>122</sup> The building was completed during 1931, its capacity 10,000 horsepower, with a peak load of 12,500 horsepower.<sup>123</sup>

The Lake Margaret Scheme provided the Company with greater versatility and delivered substantial cost savings, particularly through the decrease in the amount of firewood required to drive the numerous steam-powered boilers. The abundance of cheaper hydro-electric power allowed the Company to experiment at an early stage with a flotation process to extract the copper from the low grade ores which could not be otherwise viably treated in the blast furnaces. Providing domestic electricity was a key component in the Company's social welfare policy. Through lighting and household power, and modern electrical appliances, the effects of inclement weather and isolation could be greatly reduced and living standards improved. Details of the supply of power to the communities and its role in improving living conditions are provided in chapters six and seven of this thesis.

An efficient flotation process would prove crucial in the treating the Company's vast reserves of low grade copper ores. Developing a suitable system was slow and

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<sup>119</sup> WG Jay, *The Wild Westerners – Aspects of the History of the Zeehan Municipality*, Rosebery, WG Jay, 1988, section by J Wilson titled *Water Power on the West Coast*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>120</sup> L Whitham, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People*, Sandy Bay, Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA), 2002, p. 41.

<sup>121</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920, Queenstown.

<sup>122</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1929, p. 7, Queenstown.

<sup>123</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1931, p. 5, Queenstown.

required considerable experimentation. Flotation had been used to separate zinc at Broken Hill since 1903, and during the period 1908 to 1913 a number of applications for patents had been lodged, as industrial chemists and the like sought to further refine the process.<sup>124</sup> Treatment of copper ores by flotation had not evolved to the same extent. The first trials in Russia and at Mount Chalmers, Rockhampton, in 1910 produced poor results. Further experiments were run by the Mount Morgan Company in Queensland during 1913. By 1914 the plant was treating in excess of 500 tons of ore a day.<sup>125</sup>

Testing of flotation techniques at Mount Lyell had proceeded at much about the same time as at Mount Morgan, and had followed the 1912 purchase of the Mount Lyell Comstock Copper Company's lease in the Comstock Valley. Samples of the Lyell Comstock ore had been treated with satisfactory results using electrolysis in the assay office laboratory at the Reduction Works in 1914.<sup>126</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* noted the immense importance of the cheap hydro-electric power in the mining and milling processes. It observed that the flotation method potentially offered the Mount Lyell district a new lease of life, that 'may be so prolonged that by comparison it may yet be established that we are now only witnessing its infancy.'<sup>127</sup> The transition to flotation was important. For some time the Company had been concerned at the slow decline in the higher grade copper ores at the North Mount Lyell mine. It was keen to develop new methods to refine the low grade ores, that were otherwise uneconomic to treat by pyritic smelting. A small flotation plant was built to handle up to 600 tons of Comstock ore a week, and began operations on 17 February 1916.<sup>128</sup> The plant was not immediately successful but research into the process continued and progressive alterations and additions were made to improve efficiencies.<sup>129</sup>

During its first year of operations (1916/17) the flotation plant treated 14,129 tons of ore. Over the ensuing years plant extensions and further process refinements enabled the volume to be increased to 60,639 tons for the twelve months ending 30 September 1921. The ore treated included 6,530 tons from the Lyell Comstock mine, 18,449 tons from the North Mount Lyell mine and 35,660 tons of lower grade ore from the sorting

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<sup>124</sup> Solomon, *The Richest Lode*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>125</sup> Kerr, *Mt Morgan: Gold, Copper and Oil*, pp. 147-149.

<sup>126</sup> B Sawyer to Company Secretary, 17 April 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, pp. 157-158, AOT.

<sup>127</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 May 1914.

<sup>128</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1916, Queenstown.

<sup>129</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920, Queenstown.

section. During the same year important research had commenced in the Company's laboratory regarding the application of electrolysis for refining the blister copper.<sup>130</sup>

Although the introduction of the pyritic smelting regime had been slow, the Company's profits had shown solid returns since the outbreak of World War 1. The price of copper rose from £52 18s. per ton in 1914<sup>131</sup> to £136 8s. 9d. per ton in 1916.<sup>132</sup> The improved prices led to increased dividends paid. Production costs escalated due to union demands for higher wages and a reduction in work times in 1917 from 48 hours to 44 hours per week. After the War, demand for copper fell and by March 1921 the price hovered at £70 a ton.<sup>133</sup> The combination of high production costs and low returns saw the copper mines at Cobar, in New South Wales, and at Mount Elliott, in Cloncurry, Queensland, close soon after the War. Production at Mount Lyell had declined through 1919, brought on by a combination of labour shortages, a major influenza epidemic and a protracted strike by seamen between 20 May and 28 August 1919. A marine engineer's strike followed by a strike at the Company's refining works, from 15 December 1919 to 27 February 1920 further reduced outputs.<sup>134</sup>

Industrial action was not limited to Mount Lyell. Broken Hill unionists had walked out in May 1919, not to return to work until 10 November 1920.<sup>135</sup> At Mount Morgan the cost of production had exceeded the market price of copper, causing management to seek a 20 per cent reduction in wages. The proposed cut was rejected and the mine closed on 24 March 1921. The issues at Mount Morgan remained unresolved for nearly a year, and during this time the Mount Lyell Company became the only copper producer in Australia.<sup>136</sup> The downward trend in copper prices caused the Mount Lyell directors to ponder closing operations. The December 1920 costs of production were estimated to be £100 per ton, of which nearly £10 was attributed to recent wage increases. At the same time the price for copper had fallen to £83 10s. Management reviewed its options, whether to deplete the ore reserves at a loss, as against the advantages of keeping the organisation and men together. It was resolved

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<sup>130</sup> R Sticht to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 14 October 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/341, pp. 6 & 17, AOT.

<sup>131</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p. 10, Queenstown.

<sup>132</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1916, p. 11, Queenstown.

<sup>133</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920, p. 6, Queenstown.

<sup>134</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920, p. 10, Queenstown.

<sup>135</sup> B Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale, A Social History of Broken Hill, 1883-1921*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1978, pp. 162-173.

<sup>136</sup> Kerr, *Mt Morgan: Gold, Copper and Oil*, pp. 166-173.

that production would continue providing the metal prices soon improved.<sup>137</sup> The directors requested Sticht to cut back on all but essential works. Sticht advised his Board that production costs per ton could be reduced by implementing large-scale mining of the North Mount Lyell orebody. This option was not adopted due to the severe shortage of underground miners in the district.<sup>138</sup>

Despite reductions to the overheads, copper prices continued to decline. The Company issued a notice to its employees on 24 March 1921, requesting that they consider a 10-15 per cent reduction in wages and staggered working hours.<sup>139</sup> The combined unions duly rejected the Company's request as there was a prevailing opinion that the Company was bluffing with its threats to close. Upon notification of the negative response, Sticht advised his Board that there was a feeling in the Lyell Community 'that nothing can ever happen to the Mount Lyell Company.'<sup>140</sup> On 28 April 1921 the Company issued an ultimatum to workers, to deliver increased outputs and decreased production costs, as it was only prepared to underwrite losses for six months, otherwise all works would be closed.<sup>141</sup> The workers did not respond favourably, causing the Board to instruct Sticht to prepare for the cessation of all operations on 16 June 1921.<sup>142</sup> Sticht scaled down all fringe operations, laid off workers and stopped credit at the Company's three butchers shops and the grocery shop. Following these actions, Sticht reported to his Directors that the reality of closure was gradually dawning upon the men.<sup>143</sup>

As the situation deteriorated the union movement's non-conciliatory stance came under significant public pressure. The Tasmanian Government was criticised for its lack of constructive ideas in seeking to resolve the matter. As the largest single industry in the State, with about 7,000 people directly affected by the closure, the situation at Mount Lyell was considered to be potentially disastrous for the West Coast and for

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<sup>137</sup> Company Secretary to General Manager, 23 December 1920, Staff Letters, NS 1711/556, pp. 7-11, AOT. The actual increases paid to the seven individual unions are listed in Sticht's letter to the Company Secretary, 19 March 1921, pp. 307-307A.

<sup>138</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 7 January 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/339, pp. 64-68, AOT.

<sup>139</sup> Statement issued by Board for the information of Employees, 24 March 1921, NS 1711/339, p. 323, AOT.

<sup>140</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 12 April 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/339, pp. 402-405, AOT. This general perception was to prevail until 14 December 1994, when the owners of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, Renison Goldfields Consolidated, finally terminated mining activities at Mount Lyell.

<sup>141</sup> R Sticht, Notice to Employees, 28 April 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/339, p. 473, AOT.

<sup>142</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 17 May 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/340, pp. 43-45, AOT.

<sup>143</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 20 May 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/340, pp. 53-57, AOT.

Tasmania.<sup>144</sup> The Melbourne based *Argus* newspaper, referring to the closures at Broken Hill and Mount Morgan, criticised the “feckless folly” employed by the labour movement in expecting shareholders to subsidise the payment of wages paid when the mines had been highly profitable.<sup>145</sup>

With the unions and the Company unable to reach agreement, the matter was placed before the Federal Arbitration Court. The Company agreed to defer its closure until 29 June, by which time an independent audit could be completed to advise on the Company’s costs of producing copper. The accountant’s report duly confirmed the Company was producing copper at a loss of £18 6s.2d. per ton, which equated to £95,972 per annum.<sup>146</sup> No longer willing to accede to any further union demands, and believing the outcome of the Arbitration Court would be inconclusive, Sticht acted on his Board’s advice and posted a notice to employees on the morning of 29 June 1921. All ore-breaking operations would terminate with the afternoon shift. The news caused immediate angst and depression throughout the region. At 3pm that afternoon Justice Powers of the Arbitration Court granted flexible hours for the underground work and the suspension of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers Award. This outcome ensured the continuance of the mining operations at Mount Lyell and prompted Sticht to cancel the morning’s notice, much to the elation of the Lyell community.<sup>147</sup>

Under Sticht’s management, 1897 to 1922, the Mount Lyell Company prospered and dividends were paid in all but three years while he was at the helm. The first instance was in 1913, and followed the North Mount Lyell mine’s temporary closure after a disastrous underground fire on 12 October 1912. The second and third occasions occurred in consecutive financial years, 1920/21 and 1921/22, prompted by a succession of off-shore strikes and the substantial fall in world copper prices.<sup>148</sup> Despite the industrial turmoil and depressed metal market in his latter years, the Mount Lyell Company was the only copper producer in Australia to remain in production. The original Mount Lyell Company (1893-1903) had paid a total of £996,574 in dividends and during the period 1903 to 1922, the amalgamated Company paid a further £2,833,435 3s. 9d., yielding a total dividend of £3,830,009 3s. 9d., paid under Sticht’s

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<sup>144</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 April 1921.

<sup>145</sup> *Argus*, 25 April 1921.

<sup>146</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 June 1921.

<sup>147</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 30 June 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/340, pp. 197-204, AOT.

<sup>148</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-years ending 31st March 1913 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 1913, and for the Years ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920 and 1921, Queenstown.

reign.<sup>149</sup> The Mount Lyell Company's contribution as an export earner for Tasmania's economy was considerable. On three occasions the Company had produced greater than 50% of the total income returned by the mining industry in Tasmania, the years 1915/16 to 1917/18 proving particularly productive.<sup>150</sup> During this period copper prices climbed to £136 8s.9d. per ton.<sup>151</sup>

Sticht presided over the Company during a particularly fruitful era, much of it stemming from the success of his pyritic smelting process. By 1920 Sticht's once dominant role had begun to wane. Blainey described his stature in his final years as 'more an historic figure than a man of the hour.'<sup>152</sup> With Sticht ailing from cancer, Russell Murray was appointed as Deputy Manager of the Company in March 1922. Murray presided over the cessation of the direct smelting of the North Mount Lyell ore and the winding back of mining operations at the Mount Lyell mine that same month. Sticht died on 30 April 1922, at the age of sixty-five. The Mount Lyell Company recorded a generous tribute to Sticht in its Minutes:

It was Mr. Sticht's genius, knowledge, resourcefulness and untiring devotion to his work which, more than anything else, brought the Company to success, and he continued to exhibit the same sterling qualities throughout his administration of the Company's affairs.<sup>153</sup>

### **Russell Murray – Serving his Apprenticeship**

Russell Mervyn Murray was born on 12 July 1877 in Victoria. Educated as a civil engineer at the University of Melbourne, Murray was keen to secure a job at Mount Lyell. He had applied several times without success before being appointed as a draftsman and assistant surveyor at Gormanston in 1900.<sup>154</sup> This section examines Murray's quick progression to a position of power within the Company. Ambitious and highly competent, Murray's career was punctuated by a series of difficult events where he demonstrated outstanding leadership qualities.

Unlike Sticht, Russell Murray's arrival at the Mount Lyell Company was low key. His employment had not received Sticht's immediate blessing. Sticht advised the Company's Secretary 'the cadet usually is very much in the way, nor is he always reliable, no matter how well recommended he may come...it is much more prudent to

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<sup>149</sup> Dividend figures obtained from Half-yearly and Annual Reports for the period 1893-1922, Queenstown.

<sup>150</sup> JPPP, Report of the Acting-Secretary for Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1921, 1922, paper 5, pp. 14 & 18.

<sup>151</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1916, p. 11, Queenstown.

<sup>152</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 264.

<sup>153</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 1922, p. 11, Queenstown.

<sup>154</sup> A Smith, 'Russell Mervyn Murray (1877-1945)', *ADB*, v. 10, pp. 649-650.



engage men who are competent to attend to a wider scope of work.’<sup>155</sup> However, Sticht was prevailed upon to employ Murray. He worked for the first three years as a surveyor and then as Assistant Engineer under WT Batchelor, a most competent and highly respected officer. Upon the sudden death of Batchelor, on 27 October 1906, Murray was appointed the ‘nominal head’ until a suitable man could be found. Convinced that he had acquired an adequate knowledge of the local workings, Murray sought Sticht’s approval to continue in the acting position ‘for such period as would enable me to show by facts and figures my fitness or otherwise to permanently fill the position.’<sup>156</sup>

Sticht did not share Murray’s confidence. He considered that Murray, while professionally sound, displayed a lack of perspicacity and was inexperienced at handling employees. Sticht advised the Company’s Secretary, Alfred Mellor, to find a suitable man.<sup>157</sup> Sticht was surprised when Mellor disagreed with his assessment, asking him to expand on his reasons for not wanting Murray in the position. Sticht conceded that Murray’s professional attainments were more than the position required. He reminded Mellor that more than aptitude and knowledge were needed to deal with the difficult mine employees. Sticht believed that an iron hand was required to handle the North Mount Lyell miners. Sticht advised that Murray’s small physical build, nervous temperament and his background as a grazier’s son, had not given him the qualities necessary to deal with the mining class. Fearing Murray’s inability to deal with strikers, Sticht again advised Mellor to ‘keep on looking for some one outside with the necessary qualities.’<sup>158</sup>

Sticht had good reason to anticipate problems from the mining fraternity, particularly the Amalgamated Miners’ Association (AMA), which had presented a number of difficulties to Sticht and Batchelor since the 1903 amalgamation of the two companies. Whereas the Mount Lyell Company had generally avoided employing unionists, it had inherited a strong union contingent on amalgamation with the North Mount Lyell Company. Sticht was strongly anti-unionist. He refused to recognise the AMA, believing emphatically that wages and employment terms were a matter for him, on behalf of his Company, without the interference from any outside source.<sup>159</sup> The

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<sup>155</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 15 June 1900, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 8, NS 1711/316, pp. 259-260, AOT.

<sup>156</sup> R Murray letter to R Sticht, 4 October 1906, General Manager’s confidential letters, File 5/2/3, pp. 1-2, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>157</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 9 October 1906, General Manager’s confidential letters, File 5/2/3, pp. 1-2, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>158</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 October 1906, General Manager’s confidential letters, File 5/2/3, pp. 1-3, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>159</sup> *Argus*, 7 August 1903.

amalgamation had alienated the former North Mount Lyell employees, particularly those living in Gormanston, North Lyell and Linda. They strongly resented the Mount Lyell Company's disciplined approach and rigid supervision. Notwithstanding Murray's apparent shortcomings, Mellor continued to support him. Murray soon disproved Sticht's reservations, demonstrating his ability to competently manage the 900 miners. He was appointed Engineer-in-Charge, from 1 October 1907.<sup>160</sup>

While Sticht had worried about the impact of Murray's Grammar education and grazier's-son image with the working class miners, he was ill at ease with the men. Sticht was far more comfortable with the workers at the Queenstown Smelters who were 'more like factory laborers and are more tractable.'<sup>161</sup> As Acting-Engineer, Murray earned a reputation of being hard but fair. He demanded that his staff discharge their duties in an appropriate and dignified manner. He rebuked those who acted inappropriately by continuing to mix with the miners 'to drink, game, and meet on terms of equality.'<sup>162</sup>

During Murray's early years at Gormanston, the Company prospered. The abundance of the high-grade pyritic ore enabled the Company to manufacture sulphuric acid and superphosphate. It had opened plants at Yarraville (Victoria) in 1905, Port Adelaide (South Australia) in 1908 and North Fremantle (Western Australia) in 1910.<sup>163</sup> The outlook was bright. The Company had large proven quantities of ore at its North Mount Lyell mine and had paid regular six-monthly dividends totalling £1,695,000, since the 1903 amalgamation through to December 1911. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, recognising the achievements of the Company, acknowledged that the high returns had not been achieved at the cost of injustice to the workers. The paper considered the Company's operations to have 'enhanced the credit, tone and prestige of Tasmania as no other industry ever before.'<sup>164</sup>

Through the following decade Murray's skills as a manager of men were to be fully tested. The first signs of industrial unrest came to the fore on 3 May 1911 when the miners at the North Mount Lyell mine briefly went on strike in support of two colleagues dismissed for smoking during work time in the mine.<sup>165</sup> A second and more

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<sup>160</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 November 1907.

<sup>161</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 8 May 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, p. 887, AOT.

<sup>162</sup> R Murray letter to VH Kenyon, 29 October 1906, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS/1711/251, p. 683, AOT.

<sup>163</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-years ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1905, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1908 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 1910, Queenstown.

<sup>164</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 31 May 1910.

<sup>165</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 May 1911.

serious strike occurred on 23 September the same year. It was backed by the Amalgamated Mining Employee's Association (AMEA), which sought to have a sacked union official re-instated. The strike forced a full shut down of the Company's mining and smelting operations and was extended to a blockade at Strahan by the Waterside Workers' Union, which refused to handle the Company's goods. Also joining the action with a list of grievances was the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association. The strike lasted fifty-six days, the first men not returning to work until 18 November, delaying smelting operations until 11 December 1911. The stop work caused great disharmony and hardship within the Lyell community, and for the first time since 1903 the Company did not pay a six-monthly dividend to its shareholders.<sup>166</sup>

The industrial tension resurfaced on 21 September the following year after the death of three miners in an underground rock fall at the North Mount Lyell mine. Raising concerns about safety, the afternoon shift of 2 October 1912 refused to go underground until after the mine had been inspected and all outstanding matters were resolved. Murray played a key role in negotiations with the men. The government was also concerned. Fearing a repeat of the debilitating strike of the previous year, it looked to resolve the matter. The chief mining inspectors from Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania were requested to report on the mining activities and the safety aspects at Mount Lyell.<sup>167</sup> The men returned to work on 7 October, totally unprepared for the calamitous events to follow. On Saturday 12 October 1912, the day the Commission arrived in Queenstown to inspect the mine, a fire broke out in the underground pump house at the 700ft level of the North Mount Lyell mine. Nearly 100 men were initially entombed, requiring a massive rescue effort. Forty-two men eventually died from the effects of carbon monoxide gas, the last bodies not being recovered until after the mine was pumped dry many months later. A Royal Commission held into the North Mount Lyell Mining Disaster could not identify the actual cause of the fire 'with that degree of certainty which we should desire.'<sup>168</sup>

West Australian Mining Engineer, and former Tasmanian Government Geological Surveyor, Alexander Montgomery, investigated the safety aspects appertaining to the Mount Lyell Company's mining operations. He considered both the 21 September rock fall and the 12 October fire were to be 'regarded as abnormal mishaps.'<sup>169</sup> The Chief

<sup>166</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1912, Queenstown.

<sup>167</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>168</sup> JPPP, Royal Commission on The North Mount Lyell Mining Disaster – Report of the Commissioner, 1913, paper 2, p.5.

<sup>169</sup> JPPP, Report on the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Mines by A Montgomery, 1913, paper 8, p. 7.

Inspector of Mines, William Harper Twelvetrees, was unable to blame any party, stating the fire was a mystery and open to conjecture. He considered the fire 'a disaster in Australasian mining annals second in magnitude only to the catastrophes of Bulli in 1887, Greymouth (New Zealand) in 1896, and Mt. Kembla in 1902, in which 83, 65, and 90 perished respectively.'<sup>170</sup>

The fire had been the subject of great speculation and proved to be a very significant event in the Company's history and for the mining communities of the Lyell area. The open finding by the Commission and other government reports has led to conjecture amongst historians and mining experts. Blainey contends that several powerful co-incidences point to an incendiary being responsible, the brother of a miner killed in 21 September accident having a strong motive.<sup>171</sup> Charlie Fox, in examining the issues of courage and safety through engineer's eyes, is critical of Blainey's contention. He considers it to be flawed in many ways, but gives no substantive reason in his article. He then adds: 'but unfortunately Blainey's explanation seems to be part of Queenstown's official history.'<sup>172</sup> Fox's criticism of Blainey's contention, without offering an alternative explanation, must be disregarded.

Murray played a pivotal role in the rescue attempts. He was commended by Parliament for 'the readiness he displayed in going into the fumes in the hope of effecting something [sic] that would hasten rescue work.'<sup>173</sup> Twelvetrees' report also acknowledged Murray's brave and untiring contribution, stating that he was 'absolutely fearless and indefatigable in the operations underground during this terrible time, and continued his efforts to the extreme point of exhaustion.'<sup>174</sup> The Royal Humane Society of Australasia rewarded Murray's efforts when he, along with eight others involved in the rescue attempts, was awarded a Silver Medal for risking his life to save others. Albert M Gadd, a miner, was posthumously awarded the Clarke Gold Medal for his concerted attempts to rescue his fellow workers. The gas and smoke inhaled during these efforts eventually contributed to his early death. Through his heroic deeds, Murray's credibility was greatly enhanced. He showed an empathy with those working and living on the mining field and assisted them by introducing social reforms to assist

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<sup>170</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1912, 1913, paper 6, p. 39.

<sup>171</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 228.

<sup>172</sup> C Fox, Through Engineers' Eyes: Courage, Safety and the Mt Lyell Disasters of 1912, *THRA*, vol. 44, no. 1, June 1997, p. 132 n172.

<sup>173</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 October 1912.

<sup>174</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1912, 1913, paper 6, p. 40.

their general living conditions.<sup>175</sup> Details of the reforms are outlined in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis.

Various successful social reforms reduced many of the pre-fire tensions in the district. Murray's roll in instigating the improvements made him a popular figure. He played in local cricket games<sup>176</sup> and, upon his election as a member on the Gormanston Council in 1920, he was 'prevailed upon' to take up the position of Warden of the Municipality.<sup>177</sup> Despite taking up the General Manager's duties in Queenstown in 1922, he was elected Warden of Gormanston each year up until his death on 22 January 1945.<sup>178</sup>

### **Murray's Innovative Changes to Mining and Processing Activities**

The Arbitration Court's 29 June 1921 decision proved a watershed for the Company, enabling it to move towards increased outputs and decreased production costs. Murray's role in the Company was expanded. Competent in mining skills, possessing a forthright manner and popular with the community for his bravery and ongoing efforts to improve the living conditions for its miners, he had played an integral role in the negotiations leading up to the Arbitration Court hearing. Acknowledging Murray's valuable services to the Company, the Board elevated him to the position of Assistant General Manager immediately the decision was made to continue mining.<sup>179</sup> The alterations to the flexible working hours on alternate Saturdays proved most satisfactory for the Company and its workers. Absenteeism dropped, mine outputs improved, and contractors' wages increased. Overhead costs were generally contained.<sup>180</sup> With the worldwide mining industry in the doldrums, the Mount Lyell Company's decision to restructure was considered to be an innovative approach to counter the economic problems.<sup>181</sup>

During 1922 many changes were to occur. The 28 February 1922 decision to cease pyritic smelting, excepting for occasional parcels of high-grade material, ended the Company's reliance on the method. Mining activities were scaled down at the Mount Lyell mine. With Robert Sticht's death on 30 April 1922, so ended a remarkable era for the Company. As the region mourned the death of the architect of its fortunes, Russell Murray was promoted to fill Sticht's shoes. His task was particularly difficult

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<sup>175</sup> R Murray letter to R Sticht, 3 April 1913, NS 726/5, pp. 1-11, AOT.

<sup>176</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 April 1920.

<sup>177</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 May 1920.

<sup>178</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>179</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 July 1921.

<sup>180</sup> *Mercury*, 6 August 1921.

due to the continuing decline of copper prices, which had fallen from £80 6s.11d. to £70 11s.4d per ton. The Company's situation was only saved by improvements to the treatment methods.<sup>182</sup> Murray was well regarded among his peers and his situation was considered unique. He had served his entire professional career at Mount Lyell before being appointed manager. Murray possessed strong convictions and was able to 'ascertain facts, weigh them, and, having arrived at a considered conclusion, he is well able to offer resistance to opposition if and when it comes.'<sup>183</sup>

As the other Australian copper producers closed, the Mount Lyell Company was able to dominate the supply of the local copper markets. Times remained tough and prices fell to £66 2s.5d. per ton in 1926.<sup>184</sup> At an international level, the African, North and South American copper mines were producing large quantities of copper at comparatively low prices. To compete, the Mount Lyell Company had to continue to reduce its overheads and improve efficiencies. The flotation plant was expanded, doubling the annual ore processed between 1921 and 1926, to 115,695 tons.<sup>185</sup> The amount of ore treated in the expensive blast furnaces was reduced from 152,732 tons to 44,983 tons and blister copper output was improved nearly 20% during this same period. Exhibiting local innovation and considerable skill, much of the new plant and equipment was manufactured at the Company's Queenstown workshops, which had been developed during World War 1. The period 1921 to 1926 proved to be one of consolidation. Preparations were made for major expansion. Shareholders benefited by the improved performances. Annual profits rose from £51,830 2s.3d. to £171,861 8s.8d., and dividends were once again paid on a regular six monthly basis.<sup>186</sup>

Murray was particularly interested in the electrolysis treatment process as it could utilise the excess power generated by the Company's Lake Margaret power station. This method had been successfully employed in copper refineries in Trail in British Columbia, and at Great Falls, Perth Amboy and New York, in the United States. During 1926 Murray visited the refineries and evaluated the various techniques employed. Impressed, he returned home to compile a lengthy proposal supporting

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<sup>181</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 September 1921.

<sup>182</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1922, Queenstown.

<sup>183</sup> *Mercury*, 26 July 1922.

<sup>184</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1926, p. 5, Queenstown.

<sup>185</sup> A detailed description of the flotation process at Mount Lyell is contained in the booklet produced by the Mount Lyell Company, *Copper Mining at Mount Lyell*, which was reproduced from a series of articles published November 1940 to February 1941 in the *Chemical Engineering and Mining Review*, pp. 8-16.

<sup>186</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Years ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1921-1926, Queenstown.

electrolytic refining.<sup>187</sup> The Board readily agreed to Murray's recommendations, realising the £75,000 for the new plant would be quickly recouped from the power savings alone.<sup>188</sup>

The Company's commitment to reducing costs and increasing output was soon vindicated. The price of copper fell to £62 11s.11d. per ton in 1927, the lowest since 1914.<sup>189</sup> Further major changes were effected across the board. Mining operations ceased at the original Mount Lyell mine during 1927 following the decision to abandon using pyrites in the blast furnace. Both the pyritic smelting process and the old "Iron Blow" mine had been hallmark activities, but had now outlived their purpose. Transport systems were also reviewed. The antiquated haulage used to carry the ore over the ridge between the mines, on the eastern side of Mount Lyell and the Reduction Works on the western side, was earmarked for retirement. The North Lyell Tunnel was driven 7,000 feet between the treatment works and the 1100 Feet Level of the North Mount Lyell mine. The tunnel would eliminate the heavy reliance on the haulage-way, reduce the need to use shaft haulage systems, and enable the workshops and administration centres to be amalgamated and located at the Queenstown treatment works. From a mining perspective, the tunnel would link with other ore bodies and would enable the introduction of a cheap and efficient underground electric powered rail system.<sup>190</sup>

Other undertakings included implementing a substantial exploration program to identify low-grade copper ore reserves at the Prince Lyell and Lyell Comstock mines for large-scale mining once copper prices improved. Other Australian copper mines had all succumbed to the falling market. At Mount Morgan, after years of industrial disputes and financial losses, its shareholders had finally voted the Company into liquidation in July 1927.<sup>191</sup> The overall demise of the Australian copper industry was unforeseen, Blainey describing the events:

The stunning of the copperfields was sharp and unheralded; their directors accused Versailles and cheap aluminium, also the Industrial Workers of the World and the flotation process that the big American mines adapted more quickly than the smaller Australian mines.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> R Murray to the Company Secretary, 6 January 1927, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/348, pp. 422-442, AOT.

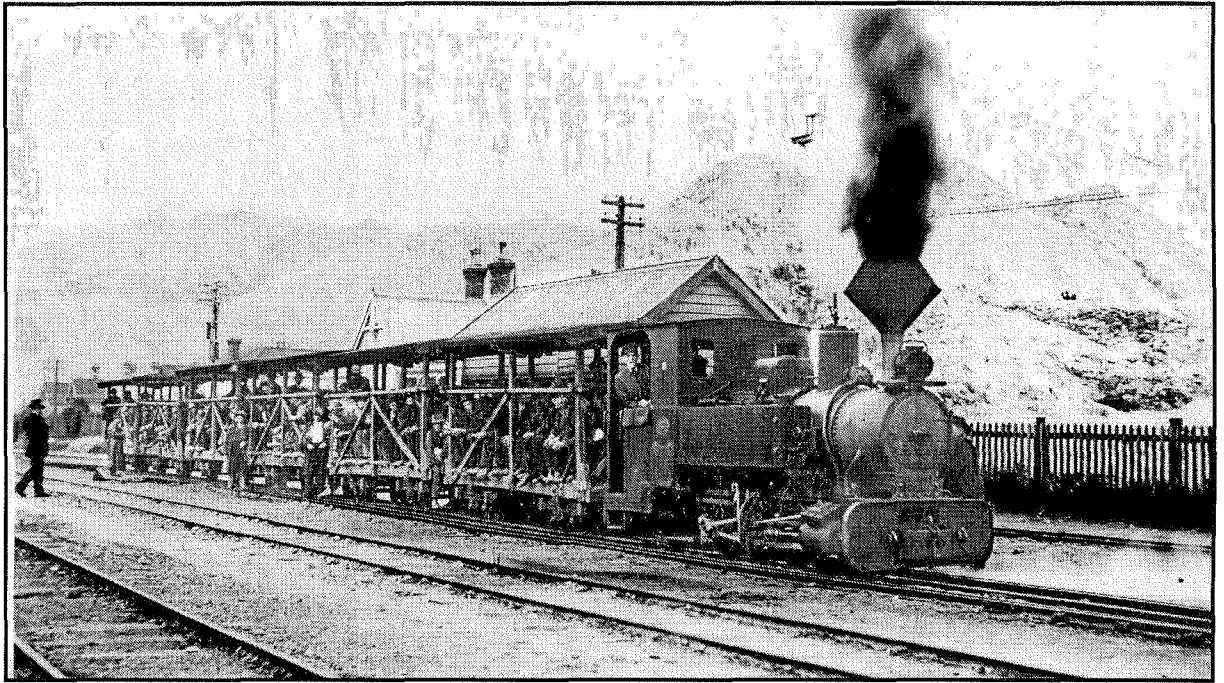
<sup>188</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1926, Queenstown.

<sup>189</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1927, p. 6, Queenstown.

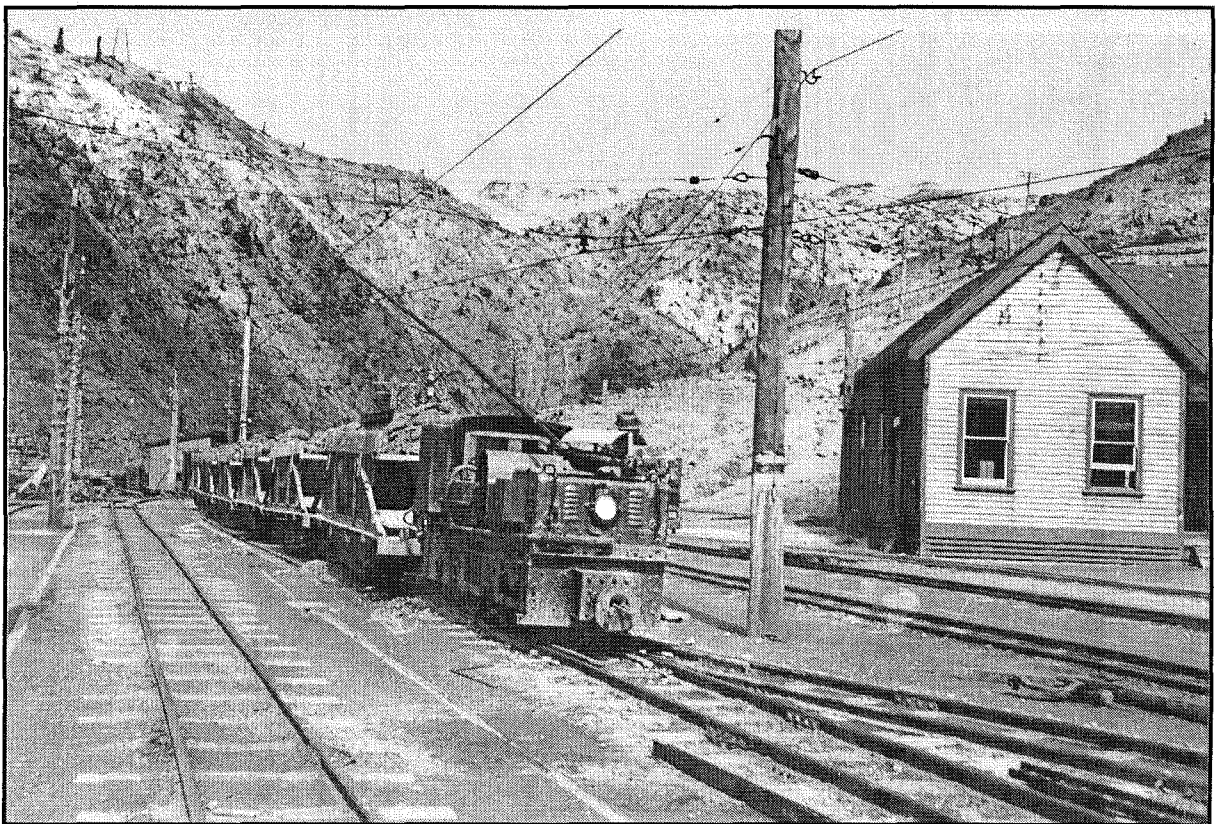
<sup>190</sup> General Manager's Report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 20 October 1927, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/349, pp. 250-251, AOT.

<sup>191</sup> Kerr, *Mt Morgan: Gold, Copper and Oil*, p. 183.

<sup>192</sup> G Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2003, p. 285.



WORKERS' TRAIN AT QUEENSTOWN – c. 1927



UNDERGROUND ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVE NEAR SMELTERS – c. 1930



It was widely hoped the faith and endeavour shown by Murray and the Board of Directors, in maintaining the mining operations at Mount Lyell, would be rewarded. The Company's Chairman, George Swinburne, justifiably recognised the bold spirit of enterprise shown by the shareholders in expending such large sums of their available cash resources, when there was 'little prospect of any material change in the world's price of copper.'<sup>193</sup> The electrolytic refinery was commissioned on 30 April 1928. Four months later the North Lyell Tunnel was opened on 4 September 1928. The impacts were immediate. Copper output increased for the financial year from 5,635 tons to 7,060 tons, rising further to 7,803 tons in 1929. Copper prices peaked at £83 1s.4d. in 1929, which saw the Company's annual profit soar to £324,128 0s.11d. Such results had not been experienced since the halcyon years that followed the 1903 amalgamation.<sup>194</sup>

The year 1928 was a defining point in the Company's operations. The North Lyell Tunnel had eliminated the isolation of the Company's mining activities from its processing operations. At the Reduction Works, research into selective flotation yielded positive results. By increasing the copper concentrate from 17.71% to 20%, savings were achieved in the smelting costs. The completion of the Electrolytic Refinery similarly provided substantial benefits. The blister copper could now be treated onsite to separate the copper, silver and gold. It had been shipped to the United States and to Port Kembla, for final processing. As with the flotation process, the Company also effected ongoing changes to its Electrolytic Refinery. Originally designed to produce 8,000 tons of cathode copper annually, the refinery's capacity was upgraded in 1931 to 13,000 tons, and again in 1937 to 14,000 tons.<sup>195</sup>

A justifiably proud Russell Murray noted in his 1928 Annual Report that the Company was now conducting every operation from mining to producing marketable copper. On the efficiencies achieved by centralising operations, he stated 'the new mine entrance and buildings are in close proximity to the Concentrator, Smelter and Refinery, and give a compactness and comprehensiveness to the complete undertaking which is

<sup>193</sup> Report of the Annual Meeting, 9 December 1927, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>194</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Years ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1927-1929, Queenstown.

<sup>195</sup> Detailed descriptions of electrolytic refining at Mount Lyell are contained in two booklets produced by the Mount Lyell Company. The first, based on an article written c. 1933 by RM Murray, is titled *Electrolytic Copper Refining at Mount Lyell*, Tasmania, and is a reprint from *Transactions*, American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers, Volume 106, pp. 408-416. The second booklet, *Copper Mining at Mount Lyell*, was reproduced from a series of articles published November 1940 to February 1941 in the *Chemical Engineering and Mining Review*, and covers the complete operations at Mount Lyell.

unique in copper-mining practice.’<sup>196</sup> The following year the Chairman of Directors, Colin Templeton, lauded Murray’s indefatigable efforts in the interests of the Company, stating that he was ‘the king pin of the whole concern.’<sup>197</sup>

As the demand for copper increased, the Company’s long-term success appeared assured. Avoiding the pitfalls of complacency, Murray’s resolve remained fixed on further reducing production costs. He was aware of pending developments of extensive copper deposits in Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo which could reduce future market prices. Murray re-opened the underground operations at Lyell Comstock, which had been closed since 1921. Investigations into the ore reserves in the Royal and South Tharsis Mines had also commenced, the advantages of these mines being their ability to be accessed from the North Lyell Tunnel. Long term power supply options were reviewed, which saw another turbine added to the existing power station and a second power station built one mile further downstream, on the Yolande River.<sup>198</sup>

In 1929 the Company produced 8,689 tons of copper, valued at £740,985, an increase from the previous year’s output of 6,421 tons, worth £444,802. This good fortune was not shared by the remainder of the mining fraternity in Tasmania. While the total value of the State’s mineral production had increased from £1,593,828 in 1928 to £1,790,653 in 1929, the Director of Mines, A. McIntosh Reid, noted this was entirely due to the extraordinary results obtained at Mount Lyell. He considered the figures to be an aberration as the year 1929 would be remembered ‘as the beginning of a serious mining depression, owing, in the first place, to the collapse of the markets for all base metals, except those of copper, tungsten, iron, and manganese.’<sup>199</sup> Although the signs of a slowing Tasmanian economy were apparent early in the year, the sudden collapse of the New York stock exchange on 28 October 1929 threw the world into a sudden economic crisis. International trade fell considerably. Tasmania did not escape the fallout. It suffered terribly, ‘unemployment rose from 9 to 27% and the State income declined by more than half.’<sup>200</sup>

The swiftness and severity of the downturn caught many West Coast mining ventures unawares. The future was bleak, the low ruling prices for base metals and silver being responsible for closing most of the producing mines in the State. Miners

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<sup>196</sup> General Manager’s Report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 19 October 1928, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/350, p. 169, AOT.

<sup>197</sup> Report of Annual Meeting, 13 December 1929, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>198</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1929, Queenstown.

<sup>199</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1929, 1930, paper 5, pp. 8-10.

<sup>200</sup> WA Townsley, *Tasmania-From Colony to Statehood, 1803-1945*, Hobart, St David’s Park Publishing, 1991, pp. 337-343.

readily sought assistance under the *Aid to Mining Act* 1927, the numbers of claims rising through 1930. Misinterpreting the seriousness of the situation was James Stirling, Manager of the Emu Bay Railway Company. Stirling's railway connected the seaboard of Burnie and the mining communities of Waratah, Magnet, Mount Farrell, Rosebery, Renison Bell, Williamsford and Zeehan. In February 1930 he confidently predicted a slow but solid year. Within two months, many of the mines along the railway had closed or had reduced operations to such an extent that Stirling was forced to retrench staff and downgrade services to four trains a week.<sup>201</sup>

The West Coast downturn was widespread. The Electrolytic Zinc Company gave retrenchment notices to its Zeehan employees and to its miners at Rosebery and Williamsford on 17 October 1930. Some smaller shows reverted to tributor mining, while some of the more industrious unemployed miners turned their efforts to prospecting for alluvial gold and osmiridium. In the neighboring areas of Zeehan and Dundas, the effects of the mining downturn were particularly severe, the government providing a special grant to relieve unemployment. The Mines Department implemented drilling and boring programs on the West Coast in search of new mineral lodes.<sup>202</sup>

While the surrounding districts floundered, Russell Murray planned further expansions at Mount Lyell. As the North Mount Lyell ore reserves were nearly exhausted, it was time to concentrate on the vast deposits of low-grade ores. Exploration and development work had identified 600,000 tons of 3.25% copper at the Lyell Comstock mine, 2,500,000 tons at the Royal Tharsis mine (2.25%), 500,000 tons at the Crown Lyell mine (2%), and 1,000,000 tons at the Lyell Tharsis mine (1.25%). Most importantly, a surface deposit comprising some 5,000,000 tons of 1% ore had been uncovered at the Prince Lyell Mine which could be mined by cheap open-cut methods. Murray was suitably encouraged by these ore reserves, all being considerably richer than the high volume but low-grade copper mines in Arizona and Canada. Murray aimed to increase the 1929 copper production figures by nearly 40% to 13,000 tons. The commissioning of the second power station in 1932 was crucial to his plan. To achieve the desired output, Murray estimated that £45,500 was required, which would be recouped in just over a year.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>202</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1930, 1931, paper 3, p. 6.

<sup>203</sup> R Murray to the Company Secretary, 29 May 1930, Confidential Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/35, pp. 1-12, AOT.

The Directors accepted Murray's recommendations for the additions and extensions to the various sections of the plant. The works were completed during 1931. The benefits of Murray's improvements were almost immediate. The volume of ore mined in 1932 increased from 292,830 tons to 362,591 tons. The costs of mining, concentrating, smelting, converting and refining fell, while the production of copper rose from 10,033 tons to 10,956 tons. These encouraging results proved to be fortuitous as copper prices tumbled to an all time low of £38 3s.1d. per ton, less than half the ruling rate during the 1921 world slump in copper prices.<sup>204</sup> Despite the poor market conditions, the Company still managed to pay a small dividend from its £43,979 17s.0d profit. The *Melbourne Herald* advised shareholders to 'await a recovery of more settled conditions, there should be considerable possibilities in the scrip of this efficiently conducted enterprise.'<sup>205</sup>

Copper prices slightly improved towards the end of the Depression, the returns ranging between £41 and £46 per ton for the years 1933-35. Importantly, Murray was able to maintain outputs in excess of 10,000 tons of copper, except in 1934 when the production level fell to 7,154 tons. The dry weather had caused a reduction in the power supply from Lake Margaret and the suspension of ore production for 86 days.<sup>206</sup> Despite the low rainfall, Murray was confident the Company had survived the worst of the Depression. In August 1934 he summarised the position at Mount Lyell thus:

The Company has large reserves of ore fully developed and excellent prospects of very substantial accessions. It has a complete and up-to-date plant for the carrying out of all operations from ore extraction to the production of electrolytic copper. It has its own hydro-electric power plant capable of supplying all power requirements at very small cost, possesses other natural advantages such as cheap water supply, timber supply, and mine filling supply, and altogether is well situated to produce copper at a very low cost.<sup>207</sup>

Murray's comments were fully justified. In 1935 the Company achieved record mining and production levels. The output from its North Mount Lyell, Lyell Comstock, Royal Tharsis, Crown Lyell, West Lyell and Prince Lyell mines totalled 580,898 tons, from which 13,966 tons of copper were produced, an increase of 27.5% on the 1932 record of 10,956 tons. Importantly, copper prices had started to increase, rainfall at Lake Margaret had returned to near normal, production costs again decreased and open cut mining had commenced at West Lyell.<sup>208</sup> The survival of the Company through the

<sup>204</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1932, Queenstown.

<sup>205</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, 15 December 1932.

<sup>206</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1934, Queenstown.

<sup>207</sup> R Murray to the Company Secretary, 31 August 1934, Confidential Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/35, p. 279, AOT.

<sup>208</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1935, Queenstown.

Depression had been vital to the ailing Tasmanian economy. It produced well over a third of the State's mineral exports in every year but 1934. For the Lyell region, operations had provided stability for its workforce and families, the average annual employment number at the works rising from 1203 in 1929 to 1758 in 1935.<sup>209</sup> The Minister for Mines, Thomas Davies, singled out the Company's progressive policy and outstanding achievements in his Ministerial Statement tabled in the House of Assembly on 27 October 1936.<sup>210</sup>

Under Murray's leadership, the Mount Lyell Company's operations had been transformed into a low-cost, high production operation that was competitive on the world copper markets. In 1933 it had gained total domination of the Mount Lyell mining field, following the acquisition of the Tasman and Crown Lyell lease in the Lyell Comstock Valley.<sup>211</sup> Freed of its earlier union problems, the Company had gained the cooperation of its workforce through applying responsible work practices and introducing a wide-ranging welfare scheme, details of which are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Aiding the transformation of the mining enterprise was the Company's strong and rigid control over its transport systems, as covered in the following chapters.

### **The Real Cost of Mining**

Within the relatively isolated confines of the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region, the Mount Lyell Company rose to dominate the copper mining industry through the application of innovative work practices. Under the cover of isolation the surrounding countryside and river systems were slowly despoiled, the new work practices producing horrific effects on the environment. A dependant government and general community did little to prevent the inevitable damage. The Company was aided by government to quell opposition to the polluting discharges. This section provides an insight into the causes of the pollution, the sporadic attempts to restrict damage and the intransigent attitudes adopted by the Company.

From the outset, the Company made little attempt to control its pollution and, generally, the community accepted it as "their lot." In some instances, the effects of some forms of pollution have only become apparent more recently. In his writings on the early developments at Mount Lyell, mining historian Kerry Pink credits Sticht with having brought the industry to life with the firing of the first furnace on 25 June 1896.

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<sup>209</sup> Average employment figures for 1929 – 1203, 1930 – 1322, 1931 – 1441, 1932 – 1519, 1933 – 1481, 1934 – 1469 and 1935 – 1758, refer to Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/684, pp. 109, 411, NS 1711/685, p. 319, NS 1711/686, pp. 151, 558, NS 1711/687 p. 445 and NS 1711/688, p. 239, AOT.

<sup>210</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines, 27 October 1936, 1936, paper 25, p. 1.

These furnaces created a lifetime of legacies, including the huge black slag dump in front of the works and the bare and barren hills of Mount Lyell. Pink attributes the lunar landscape to a chain reaction of devastating proportions, caused by a combination of sulphur fumes, excessive timber cutting, bushfires and torrential rains.<sup>212</sup> Blainey considers the Lyell hills represent both a disaster and a triumph, Sticht's crowning achievement being to smelt hard rock with the aid of virtually no fuel, the creation of jobs and wealth, the penalty being the bare hills that 'continue to puzzle, anger, delight or astonish visitors.'<sup>213</sup>

At the time Sticht lit the first furnace he would have known from his American experiences of the deleterious effects of the billowing clouds of sulphur fumes.<sup>214</sup> The government recognised the need to protect the Mount Lyell Company against claims of future nuisance. It moved quickly and proclaimed a 2,305 acre parcel, known as the Mount Lyell Reserve, to be a Noxious Trade Area, in accordance with the provisions of *The Public Health Act, 1885*.<sup>215</sup> This move sanctioned the Company's copper smelting operations. The proclamation was timely for within a little over three months after the first furnace had been lit a *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* correspondent noted:

The effect of the sulphur fumes from the smelters is now particularly noticable [sic]. For a distance of fully a mile to the north, south, and east of the works the forest presents the appearance of having been ring-barked, while the ferns and undergrowth are pretty well all as dead as Julius Caesar.<sup>216</sup>

Aside from the airborne emissions, the Mount Lyell Company had difficulties in containing its other activities within the extent of its Queen River Valley leased areas. Sticht informed his directors that, owing to the broken and rugged ground, it had been necessary to build outside the selected area. There was also a pressing need to increase the leased area to include the slag dump and the nearby limestone and silica flux quarries. Sticht required a clarification concerning the areas that had been set aside for the harvesting of wood-fuel. He anticipated the Company's fuel requirements were likely to increase from 15,000 tons of wood to at least 50,000 tons annually, once the smelters were fully operational. Sticht urged the Directors to look to the future, both in

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<sup>211</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 194.

<sup>212</sup> Pink, *The Tasmanian West Coast Story*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>213</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 348.

<sup>214</sup> McShane, 'Robert Carl Sticht (1856-1922)', p. 94. Having spent fifteen years on the fields of Colorado and Montana to become the foremost authority on pyritic smelting in the USA, Sticht would have been acutely aware of the sulphur emissions and their polluting effects on the countryside.

<sup>215</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 25 August 1896, p. 1416.

<sup>216</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 October 1896.

the best interests of the industry and for the prospective welfare of Tasmania.<sup>217</sup> Heeding Sticht's advice, the Company approached the government to rectify the existing anomalies in the lease and to extend the areas of occupation. The legislation was duly proclaimed on 8 July 1898, increasing the Company's Queen River occupation to 444 acres 3 roods and 10 perches.<sup>218</sup>

By October 1897 the sulphur emissions had created widespread damage to the surrounding countryside, which worried Sticht as he foresaw the possibility of damages claims being lodged against his Company. He requested Alfred Mault, Secretary of the Central Board of Health, to extend the Noxious Trade Area to include the newly established Town of Queenstown.<sup>219</sup> Mault advised Sticht that it was likely the government would support an extension of the Noxious Trade Area out to a five miles radius from the Works, but Queenstown and Gormanston would not be included in the area. Mault was mindful of the importance of the Mount Lyell Company's operations to Tasmania. He advised Sticht of a simple defense to be used in the event of a claim. The Company was 'carrying on the trade of smelting with the best means known at the day for the prevention of damage to the surrounding country, this means being the only method in use anywhere with economical results or satisfaction to the Works or the communities, and consisting simply of a high chimney.'<sup>220</sup>

Edward Counsel, the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, expressed reservations in selling the residential land in the new Queenstown township due to the unpleasant experience of living near the smelters.<sup>221</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* observed that on occasions of heavy fogs, the sulphur fumes were prevented from rising, rendering the atmosphere 'disagreeable in the extreme, and the inhalation of such an amount of fog and sulphur combined cannot be otherwise than injurious to health.'<sup>222</sup> Sticht did consider other processing alternatives to reduce the sulphur emissions, but concluded that it would be impossible for the Company to deal with the voluminous fumes other than by making sulphuric acid or some other perfectly valueless product. He was aware that such options would very likely contaminate the rivers and cause a

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<sup>217</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 1 August 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 2, NS 1711/310, pp. 652-661, AOT.

<sup>218</sup> Under the provisions of *The Mount Lyell Reserve Leases Act*, areas described in the Second Schedule of *The Mount Lyell Company's Leases Act*, 1893, were amalgamated to form a single leased area.

<sup>219</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 9 October 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, pp. 341-342, AOT.

<sup>220</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 October 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, pp. 360-361, AOT.

<sup>221</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899, paper 47, p. 14.

<sup>222</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 June 1897.

greater risk to the environment than that caused by the sulphur fumes. The support provided to the Company by high-ranking government officials, including Mault, gave him a measure of comfort. Sticht was well aware the Lyell community, and Tasmania at large, placed an ever increasing reliance on the Company's operations and he was quietly confident that 'public sentiment ought always to be able to subdue any inimical claims on the part of residents.'<sup>223</sup>

Despite the increasing obtrusiveness of the sulphur smog and its blatant detrimental effects on the Mount Lyell surroundings, Sticht actively contested complaints on behalf of the Company, although he did admit privately to his Directors that the claims were often real and actual damages had been incurred. One such complaint, received from Linda Valley landowner, Dr William Atkinson Harrison, dated 9 May 1900, arose from the poor state of his pasture and gardens. Sticht advised the Directors that he had no doubt the sulphur fumes had affected the property. However, as Harrison was considered to be litigious, he supported the Directors in their refusal to accept responsibility for the matter.<sup>224</sup> Believing public sentiment to be on the side of the Company, Sticht recommended 'that no compromise should be entered into, as once a breach is made it is impossible to tell how far claims may be carried, and how numerous they may become.'<sup>225</sup>

Sticht was quite prepared to bully his opponents when necessary. In 1906 a disappointed Town Board met with him to complain about the effects of the sulphur fumes on the iron roofs, spouting, property and plant life in Queenstown. Sticht queried the basis of the Board's proof, asking why it should interest itself with something so absurd. In a veiled threat, he then stated the case where a smelting firm in Keswick, California, 'simply dismantled its works and re-erected the smelting plant 300 miles away, preferring to bear the cost of carriage of ore that distance rather than incur costs of litigation.'<sup>226</sup> The Hobart *Clipper* raised the issue of sulphur poisoning and the lack of effort by companies to minimise poisoning either physically, mentally or morally, cynically observing 'it would be an interference with "the private enterprise of the foreign investor"' to ask the company to abate their death-dealing nuisance.'<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 October 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, p. 362, AOT. It is interesting to note Sticht's argument of convenience was to be disregarded some twenty-five years later when the Company changed to the flotation treatment of its ores, which led to the dumping of vast amounts of waste product into the Queen River.

<sup>224</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 June 1900, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 8, NS 1711/316, p. 251, AOT.

<sup>225</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 23 June 1900, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 8, NS 1711/316, p. 271-273, AOT.

<sup>226</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 November 1906.

<sup>227</sup> *Clipper*, 15 August 1900.



The effects of the sulphur were not confined to the countryside, but also affected everyday living. The Queenstown and Reduction Works Band claimed that its brass instruments had worn out prematurely due to the effects of sulphur fumes. Appealing to Sticht's love of culture, the band's Secretary, Walter Reid, asserted that in discoursing sweet music the band had tried its best 'to brighten the lives and break the somewhat monotonous existence of the people living in a town which has such numerous disadvantages as Queenstown.'<sup>228</sup> Sticht responded positively in this instance, advising his directors that brass work did go to pieces quickly and, as the band did provide a service on social occasions, he recommended a donation towards new instruments.<sup>229</sup> The Lyell residents were generally accepting of their lot, adopting a philosophical approach to the sulphur emissions. Some attempted to grow their flowers under cover or resorted to pot plants.<sup>230</sup> Some positives could be drawn from the high emissions of the sulphur, with local and overseas medical reports endorsing the inhalation of sulphurous fumes as an effective means of dealing with consumption. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* wryly observed 'at Queenstown we have a large and natural sanatorium, to which persons suffering from incipient consumption may go with almost a certainty of cure.'<sup>231</sup>

In one sense, the belching clouds of sulphur dioxide gave the townspeople an air of confidence, that all was well with the Company and their jobs. Their lifestyles were secure. The *Herald* noted that after one strike-induced shutdown at the Reduction Works, lasting for nearly two months in 1911, the return of the familiar sulphur fumes was unlikely to draw any complaints.<sup>232</sup> At Gormanston and Linda, located downwind from the smelters, the sulphur fumes and bushfires caused a total degradation of the vegetation. The once abundant growth disappeared, 'the charred stumps which thickly stud the hills, the dark peat and the black fern butts tell the tale that after the sulphur fumes had done their deadly work, the scourge of fire swept the hills as if to add something to the grim and weird scene.'<sup>233</sup> Robson noted that on clear days passenger ships sailing into Macquarie Harbour could see the pall of sulphur fumes rising from the Queenstown furnaces fifteen or twenty miles away, 'it smelt of money.'<sup>234</sup>

<sup>228</sup> W Reid letter to R Sticht, 20 November 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 11, NS 1711/319, p. 307, AOT.

<sup>229</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 November 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 11, NS 1711/319, p. 302, AOT.

<sup>230</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 January 1912.

<sup>231</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 March 1908.

<sup>232</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 February 1912.

<sup>233</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 February 1914.

<sup>234</sup> L Robson, *A History of Tasmania – Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 197.

In July 1928, some years after pyritic smelting had ceased, Russell Murray was brutally honest when he blamed the destruction of practically all the plant life around the Lyell area on the enormous volumes of sulphur fumes emitted from the Company's smelters. He considered the years 1896 to 1903 to be the worst for pollution due to the high content of sulphide ore treated. He noted the levels of sulphur reduced following the amalgamation with the North Mount Lyell Copper Company in 1903, as less pyritic ore was being smelted. Murray further observed that after 1922, when the primary treatment of the ore was changed to the flotation process, that the native vegetation was reappearing everywhere, and there was no difficulty in cultivating the most fragile garden plants. Murray identified the area of the Queen River valley affected by the fumes was roughly ten miles long by three and a half miles wide, in a north-south direction, the Smelters being in the centre. A small strip of land located to the west of the smelters suffered to a lesser extent. The prevailing westerly winds carried the gas in a compact cloud that did not readily disperse, devastating an area of approximately fifty square miles in the King River Valley, up to ten miles distant from the smelters.<sup>235</sup> The towns of Gormanston and Linda, including Dr Harrison's property, were located within this belt.

The general impacts of sulphur emissions are well documented, their effects being highly destructive to vegetation and a cause of respiratory irritation to man.<sup>236</sup> It is estimated that the Mount Lyell Company discharged 200,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide annually into the atmosphere during the 1896-1903 stage of operations.<sup>237</sup> Based on an interpretation of aerial photography, the Queenstown desert was at its maximum in the early decades of the twentieth century, when almost 1,500 hectares were completely devoid of vegetation and a further 2,500 hectares were substantially denuded.<sup>238</sup> Other incidences of pollution by sulphur fumes in Tasmania were rare. In the period 1917 to 1923 complaints were laid concerning sulphur emissions at the Zinc Works, Risdon, with trees being effected at Bedlam Walls, on the opposite side of the Derwent River. The situation was rectified with the installation of new Cottrell precipitators.<sup>239</sup>

<sup>235</sup> RM Murray letter to CE Lane, 19 July 1928, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/683, pp. 199-204, AOT.

<sup>236</sup> CG Down & J Stocks, *Environmental Impact of Mining*, Essex, Applied Science Publishers Ltd, 1978, pp. 57-68.

<sup>237</sup> C McQuade, JF Johnston & SM Innes, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, Darwin, Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, p. 14.

<sup>238</sup> IB Wood, *The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited – An Environmental Case Study*, Hobart, Tasmanian Chamber of Mines Ltd, 1992, pages not numbered.

<sup>239</sup> A Alexander, *The Zinc Works – Producing Zinc at Risdon 1916-1991*, Hobart, Pasminco Metals-EZ, 1992, p. 48.

Elsewhere in Australia, sulphur fumes presented some minor problems, particularly at the Mount Lyell Company's fertilizer works at Yarraville, in Victoria. Set up in 1904 to manufacture superphosphate, utilising Mount Lyell pyrites, claims concerning noxious fumes occurred, but the emissions appear to have been at acceptable levels and the issue did not draw further comment.<sup>240</sup> *The Australian Mining Standard*, in support of smelting operations, expressed concern at the weak and struggling companies being victimised by unwarranted and vexatious claims resulting from the emissions of noxious fumes.<sup>241</sup> Around the world damages caused by such emissions were numerous. Sticht was aware of action taken against smelters in 'Germany, Russia, France, England, Chili and other countries.'<sup>242</sup>

The second obtrusive impact created by the pyritic smelting process was the large black heap of slag. Blainey aptly describes the massive dump, which stands more than sixty feet high, half a mile long and covers forty-acres as a monument to 'the vanished era of direct smelting.'<sup>243</sup> More recent surveys estimate 6,000,000 tonnes of slag were produced. About 2,000,000 tonnes were discharged with tailings into the Queen and King River systems, and eventually into Macquarie Harbour.<sup>244</sup> The slag-heap was close to the works as it was important to quickly dump the molten material before it solidified in the slag-carts. In early years the slag-heap grew considerably. Looking for a long-term solution, Sticht investigated the possibility of building an aerial cableway to convey the slag to the adjacent Mount Lyell Reserve Company lease. This proposal did not meet with approval and did not proceed.<sup>245</sup> By 1911, with the slag dump nearly full, the Company commenced works to divert the course of the Queen River. A channel 40 chains long was cut, effectively straightening the course of the River, and providing an additional dump area of about 14 acres.<sup>246</sup> To assist in the distribution of the slag, the old carts were retired and replaced by a mechanised system. After the molten slag was tapped from the furnace, it was blasted by high-pressure jet of water, to create granulated fragments that were then carried by conveyor to a ninety-foot high tower. From here the granulated slurry was gravity fed by races to the slagheap below.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>240</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 7 December 1905.

<sup>241</sup> Mount Lyell Standard, 13 March 1901.

<sup>242</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 23 June 1900, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 8, NS 1711/316, pp. 271-273, AOT.

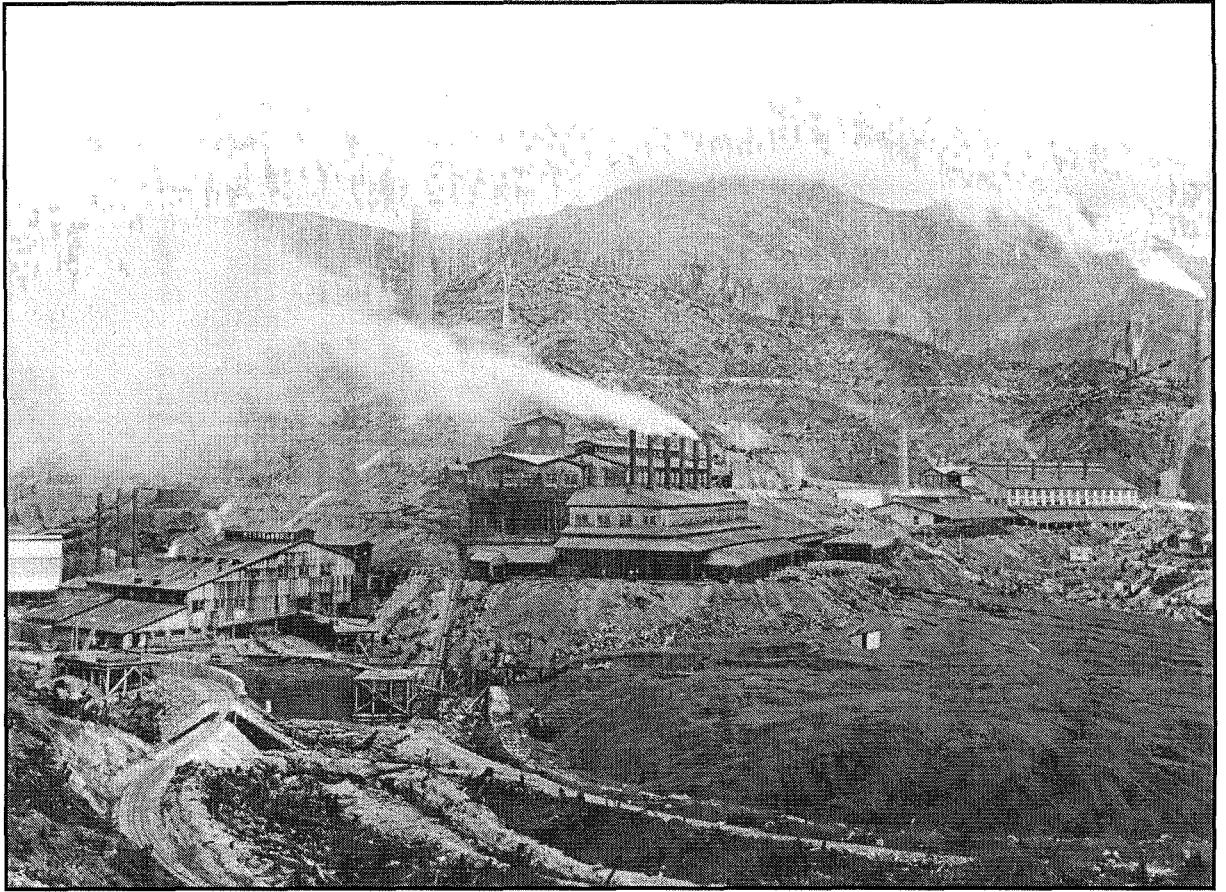
<sup>243</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 261.

<sup>244</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, p. 14.

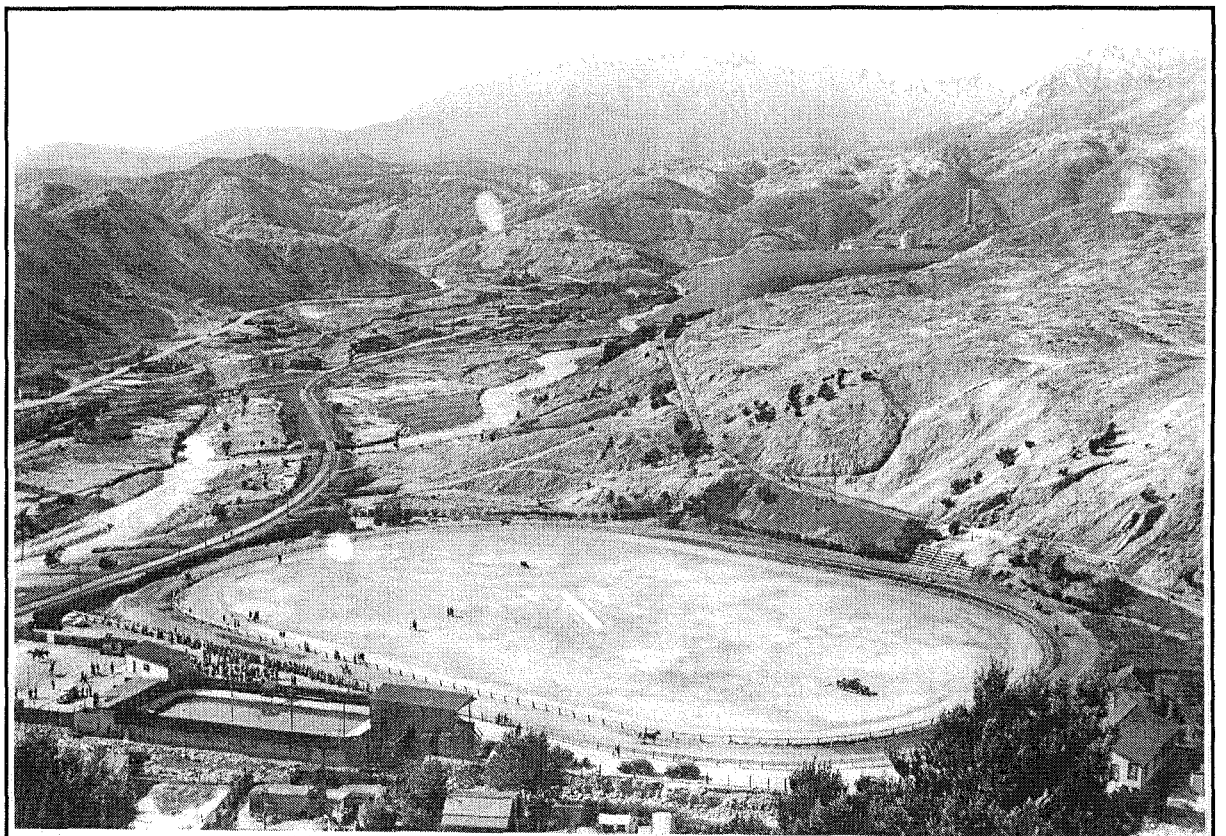
<sup>245</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 5, NS 1711/313, p. 925, AOT.

<sup>246</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 1 December 1911.

<sup>247</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 9 December 1916.



**MOUNT LYELL SMELTERS – c. 1905**



**QUEENSTOWN RECREATION GROUND – c. 1940**

During the smelters' operations the slag created a major waterborne pollution issue. The Queenstown Town Board first raised the problem with Sticht in October 1900. He advised that he would try and prevent the leakage of slag into the watercourses as it was the Company's intention to keep the Queen River 'clear in the distant, as well as the near future.'<sup>248</sup> Sticht's promise was short lived. Three years later, unannounced, the Company dumped a quantity of slag into the river on the pretext 'of an experiment to ascertain how it would react in the bed of the river.' Sticht attempted to placate the Board by stating the slag would be of benefit to the channel within the town limits and no longer would the Board need to look on with anxiety at the ever-increasing height of the dumps at the Reduction Works. Sticht reassured the Board that 'I shall always keep in mind the interests of the township in connection with the disposal of the waste material.'<sup>249</sup> The Mount Lyell Company acted from a position of power. Because it was responsible for a large proportion of the rates levied, it was able to manipulate its staff onto elected positions on the Town Board. Little wonder that Sticht remained well briefed and treated the Board with polite contempt.<sup>250</sup>

The increasing pollution emanating from the smelters had a deleterious effect on aquatic life in the Queen River. Early plans to release fish reared at the Plenty Hatchery into West Coast river systems, for recreational fishing purposes, did not include the upper section of the Queen River as it was not a stream 'in which any pure-minded fish would like to spend his days.'<sup>251</sup> By this time the Company recommenced its discrete dumping of small quantities of slag into the Queen River. This subterfuge backfired. The heavy layer of slag settled on the riverbed, effectively raising the water levels in the rivers. Heavy rainfalls caused much damage to the Company's railway bridges and other property when the levels rose to record heights.<sup>252</sup> Hartwell Conder, a resident at Lowana, claimed the combined polluting effect of the slag, domestic sewerage and other rubbish had converted the Queen and King Rivers from renowned tourist attractions into foul and poisoned sewers.<sup>253</sup> The Queenstown Council refuted Conder's allegations,

<sup>248</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 October 1900.

<sup>249</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1904.

<sup>250</sup> The inaugural Chairman of the Queenstown Town Board in 1897 was the Company's Superintending Railway Engineer, Edward Carus Drifffield, *Hobart Gazette*, 27 July 1897, p. 1289. The Board's Chairman in 1900 was Company staff member, Huntley Clarke, *Hobart Gazette*, 24 July 1900, p. 1218.

<sup>251</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 7 December 1900.

<sup>252</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 April 1906, see also Railway Report for the Half-year ending 30 September 1905, Mount Lyell Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, p. 301, AOT.

<sup>253</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 September 1919.

advising that any trace of the sewage discharges into the Queen River had dissipated by the time they had reached Lynchford, and no domestic refuse reached the King River.<sup>254</sup>

The change from pyritic smelting to the flotation method of concentrating the copper ore did not provide any respite from waterborne pollution problems. Following the trials of the flotation process in 1916, the resultant grey tailings waste was discharged into Haulage Creek, adjacent to the works, from where it flowed into the Queen and King Rivers and into Macquarie Harbour. Whereas most of the slag from the furnaces had been contained on site up until 1930, this situation changed with the Company's decision to co-dispose the slag and tailings into the river. By combining the two waste products, the slag became readily mobile and was easily dispersed by the river currents. The co-disposal dumping continued until the smelting operations at Mount Lyell finally ceased in 1969, after which the copper concentrates were exported for smelting overseas.<sup>255</sup> With the growth of the slagheap checked by the co-release of the slag and tailings into the river, it was a bemused Russell Murray who informed the Company Secretary in July 1931 that the slag-heap had been used as an airstrip. He considered the levelled surface to be so perfect for this purpose 'it would seem that an aeroplane of almost any size could be accommodated on the dump, which may be a matter of importance as aeroplaning progresses.'<sup>256</sup> A Cultural Heritage Assessment Study, completed in May 1994, identified the slag dump as a "Landscape Element" of high cultural significance, and recommended its retention.<sup>257</sup>

The volume of tailings released into the river systems increased markedly as the Company moved to large-scale mining and treatment of its ore coming into the 1930s. Scientific reports estimate 100 million tonnes had been released into the riverine environment by the time the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company closed its treatment operations in December 1994.<sup>258</sup> The large volumes of tailings impacted significantly on the river systems and in Macquarie Harbour. By August 1930 a substantial bar had formed at the mouth of the King River. On being informed of the problem by the Strahan Marine Board, Russell Murray directed the Company's Engineer, Huntley Clarke, to resolve the matter with the Harbour Master 'on the distinct understanding, however, that my Company does not accept any responsibility in the

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<sup>254</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 13 September 1919.

<sup>255</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, p. 16.

<sup>256</sup> R Murray to Company Secretary, 7 July 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/353, pp. 233-234, AOT.

<sup>257</sup> Godden Mackay, *Mount Lyell Mining Lease, Cultural Heritage Assessment Study, Volume 1 – Main Report*, Hobart, Department of Environment and Land Management, 1994, pp. 128 and 177.

<sup>258</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, pp. 16-17.

matter.<sup>259</sup> Patsy Crawford, writing on the effects of the Mount Lyell effluent on the waterways, considers it to be 'the most iniquitous and wretched inheritance a mining company could bequeath to its environment.'<sup>260</sup>

By 1995, after 102 years of copper mining at Mount Lyell, approximately 37 million cubic metres of tailings and slag had been discharged into the Queen River. The river had acted as a conduit for the material, which was carried and deposited in the lower reaches of the King River and into Macquarie Harbour. At the mouth of the river a delta with a surface area of 250 hectares above mean sea level had formed, containing 100 million tonnes of material, 85 per cent estimated to be mine waste. Sediments had been deposited on the banks of the King River, killing a large portion of the vegetation.<sup>261</sup> Equally toxic to the environment, but creating a lesser visual impact, was the acid drainage, which had leached from the sulphur ores ever since mining operations began at Mount Lyell. Acid drainage was the product of the oxidation of sulphide minerals when exposed to the atmosphere. It constituted a major pollution problem due to its ability to mobilise toxic levels of heavy metals, which have a serious impact on the environment.<sup>262</sup>

The acid drainage was particularly significant during the earliest days of mining at Mount Lyell, its corrosive effect being most noticeable on the iron and steelwork about the mines. Following the de-watering of the North Mount Lyell mine after the 1912 fire, some 116 tons of precipitates, containing 56 tons of copper, were derived from the corrosion of the iron and steelwork and from other metals exposed to the run-off water.<sup>263</sup> The copper rich mine water from the North Mount Lyell Mine was treated at the Precipitation Plant for many years and yielded small tonages of copper precipitates.<sup>264</sup> The vast areas of disturbed pyritic rock near Mount Lyell have created a considerable current-day problem for the control of acid drainage. It stemmed from the action of water over waste rock dumps, from the old mines, from natural underground drainage, from the exposed tailings and from the pyritic outcrops.<sup>265</sup> Only recently have the toxicity levels of the water from the abandoned mines been studied in Tasmania.

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<sup>259</sup> R Murray to the Secretary, Marine Board, Strahan, 26 August 1930, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/684, p. 296, AOT.

<sup>260</sup> P Crawford, *King - the story of a river*, Hobart, Montpelier Press, 2000, pp. 70-77.

<sup>261</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>262</sup> S Gurung, *Acid drainage from abandoned mines in Tasmania*, Hobart, Mineral Resources Tasmania, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>263</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 22 April 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, p. 9, AOT.

<sup>264</sup> R Sticht to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 14 October 1921, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/341, p. 6, AOT.

Analysis of the water flowing from the Mount Lyell lease has shown the presence of copper, iron, sulphate, zinc, manganese and lead at levels that will continue to impede the establishment of aquatic ecosystems in the downstream river system.<sup>266</sup>

Untreated acid drainage was not peculiar to the Mount Lyell area. As at 2002 some 681 abandoned mine sites with an acid drainage problem have been identified in Tasmania. In the King River catchment area eleven mine sites, predominantly in the Mount Lyell mineral field, have been identified as either potential acid producers or are currently releasing acid drainage.<sup>267</sup> Historically, companies and individuals paid little heed to the damage caused to the environment by mining. Recent governments have created and enforced anti-pollution legislation. Many West Coast streams, creeks and rivers had been actively used as a method of distributing mine (overburden) and processing waste (tailings), causing major damage to the Pieman River,<sup>268</sup> the Savage River,<sup>269</sup> the Little Henty River<sup>270</sup> and the Arthur River.<sup>271</sup>

### **Timber Cutting to an Excess**

Like the sulphur emissions and other waste produced at the Company's works, the wholesale deforestation of the region by timber cutters impacted on the landscape and led to major environmental damage. Large volumes of timber were cut for use in the mines, as building materials, for firing the many steam boilers about the works, as sleepers for railways and tramways and for domestic firewood. The timber proved far cheaper than imported coal and was relatively easy to obtain. In early years the Company plundered the Queen River and adjoining areas at will, harvesting nearly 68,000 tons in 1908 for firewood alone.<sup>272</sup> The small communities of Crotty and Darwin, located along the North Mount Lyell railway, and Lynchford, on the Abt railway, survived for many years as settlements for the Company's timber-cutters. In 1908 some 300 men were employed directly and indirectly procuring firewood for the Company.<sup>273</sup> This section looks at the Company timber cutting activities and the early

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<sup>265</sup> Wood, *The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited – An Environmental Case Study*, pages not numbered.

<sup>266</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, pp. 22-47.

<sup>267</sup> Gurung, *Acid drainage from abandoned mines in Tasmania*, p. 2-17.

<sup>268</sup> L Koehnken, *Pieman River Environmental Monitoring Program Technical Report*, West Coast, 1992.

<sup>269</sup> Coffey Geosciences Pty Ltd, *Savage River Rehabilitation Project*, Sydney, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, 2000.

<sup>270</sup> *Sunday Tasmanian*, 24 August 2003.

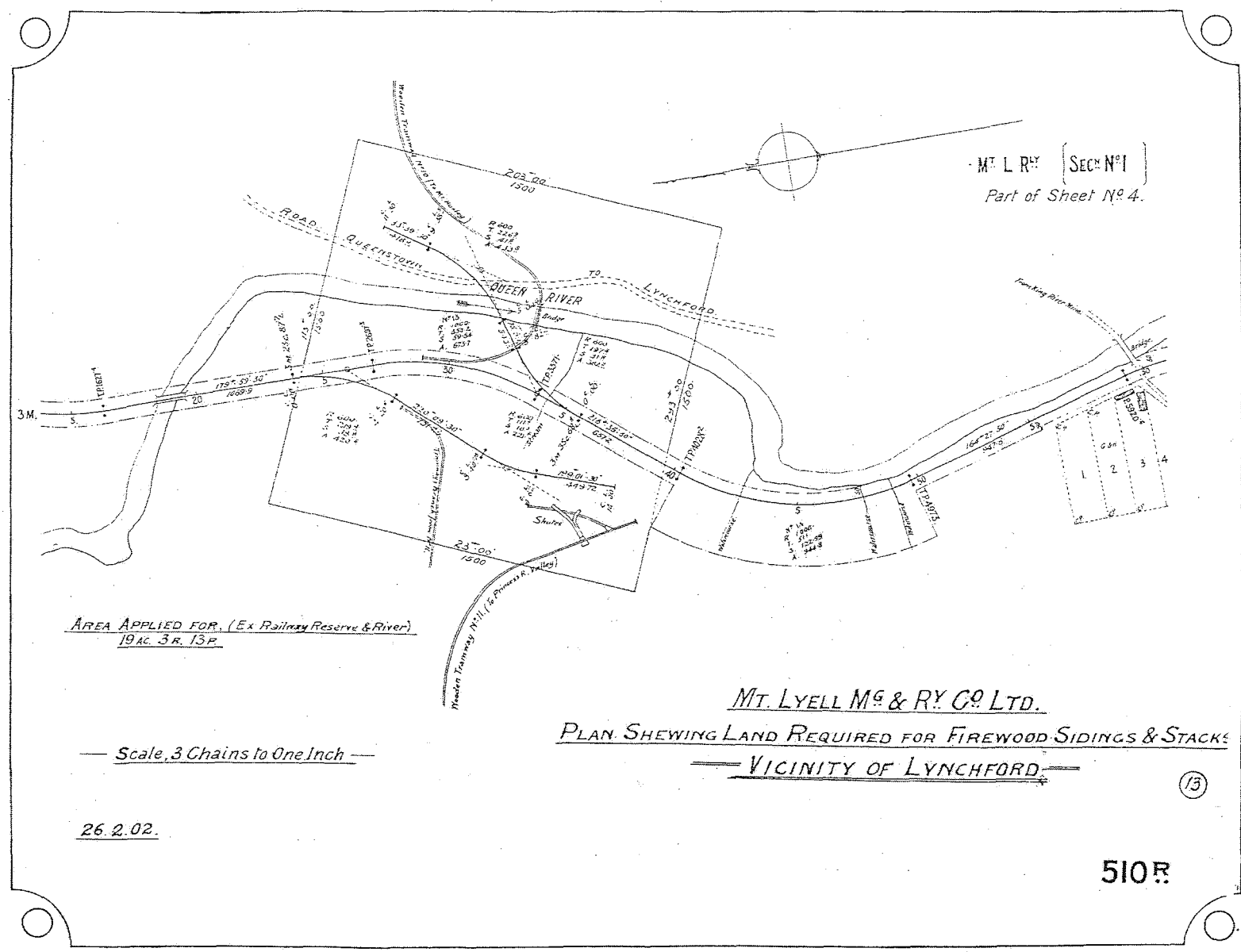
<sup>271</sup> *Sunday Tasmanian*, 10 August 2003.

<sup>272</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 22 September 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/324, pp. 269-272, AOT.

<sup>273</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 February 1908.



MAP 12 - TRAMWAYS AROUND LYNCHFORD, FEBRUARY 1902



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attempts by public bodies and groups to prevent the destruction of the natural beauty of the region.

Before the advent of mining in the Mount Lyell District, the area supported a temperate rainforest, the dominant species being Myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*), Leatherwood (*Eucryphia lucida*) and Celery Top Pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*). Less common species included King Billy Pine (*Athrotaxis selaginoides*) at higher altitudes, Huon Pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*) in the riverine areas and Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and Eucalyptus species on the drier ridges. Understorey species included Laurel (*Anopterus glandulosus*), Musk (*Olearia argophylla*), Native Pepper (*Drimys lanceolata*), Waratah (*Telopea truncata*) and Horizontal (*Andopetalum biglandulosum*), while the ground cover comprised moss and ferns.<sup>274</sup> The timber harvested by the Mount Lyell Company was sourced from many areas within the region and was transported via a myriad of railways and tramways and an intricate system of water flumes, which are described in the following chapters.

At a very early stage the wood cutting activities had been identified ‘as the ruthless destruction of native flowering plants in the neighbourhood of Queenstown and Lynchford...the beauties of nature will have been blotted out by the mischievous hands of man.’<sup>275</sup> The intense logging practices, combined with the sulphur dioxide emissions from the smelters, killed off much of the vegetation in and around Mount Lyell. Bush that survived the initial onslaught succumbed to the bushfires that regularly swept through the district. Exposed to the elements, and with no groundcover, the steep treeless slopes soon lost their topsoils to the heavy rains. Consequently, the Mount Lyell area witnessed the worst examples of sheet, rill and gully erosion in Tasmania.<sup>276</sup> Approximately 10,000,000 tonnes of topsoil has washed from the Mount Lyell mine site into the Queen and King Rivers.<sup>277</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company’s right to the timber arose from privileges conferred under the provisions of *The Mining Act* 1893. This Act provided for water access, tailings discharges and timber rights. The Company did not bother to contain its operations within the approved boundaries. It used a lack of government supervision to its full advantage. Its men deliberately cut timber well outside the leased and licensed areas. On one early occasion, after being confronted by the Crown Lands Bailiff, Sticht

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<sup>274</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, p. 20.

<sup>275</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 November 1897.

<sup>276</sup> L Richley, *Land Systems of Tasmania – Region 3*, Hobart, Department of Agriculture, 1978, pp. 31–32.



**MOUNT LYELL HAULAGE – c. 1898**

conceded his Company could be in very serious trouble. He advised the Company's Hobart adviser and local politician, Nicolas Brown, that the Company was outside its limits and was culpable for devastating the forest. Sticht told Brown that in the event the government did take a strong position against the Company he was prepared to use the ploy that smelting was too expensive without access to firewood.<sup>278</sup> In later discussions with Brown, Sticht advised that some Mount Lyell officials believed the Company was 'at liberty to roam more or less anywhere.'<sup>279</sup> The matter was eventually resolved whereby a separate license was issued to each woodcutter.

The strong demand for timber by the West Coast mining industry placed significant pressure on the rapidly diminishing resource. The easily accessed areas, close to towns and mines, had been cut out. Aware of the problem, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* called upon the government to replant the denuded areas near the mines and proclaim these areas as forest reserves.<sup>280</sup> The paper's approach was supported a short time later by a scathing report compiled by W Heyn, an English timber expert, who attacked the government's haphazard approach to forest management in Tasmania.<sup>281</sup> The issue sparked considerable controversy in Tasmanian newspapers and increased public scrutiny of forest users. The *Launceston Examiner* commented on the changing weather conditions that had followed the destruction of wide areas of forest.<sup>282</sup> Around Queenstown, the effects of ongoing logging operations were far more noticeable. Evidence of erosion and land slips were everywhere. Following a "cloudburst" on 15 April 1906, in which Queenstown experienced 5.7 inches of rain in just twenty-four hours, Sticht observed 'the devastation is accounted for largely through the freedom offered to the running away of the water by the bareness of the ground, especially the hill sides.'<sup>283</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company originally concentrated its wood cutting activities within its reserves close to the smelters, including the plateau above the Reduction Works Valley, where Sticht had erroneously reported 'there is an unlimited supply.'<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> McQuade et al, *Mount Lyell Remediation*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>278</sup> R Sticht to NJ Brown, 30 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/313, pp. 189-191, AOT.

<sup>279</sup> R Sticht to NJ Brown, 30 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/313, pp. 243-247, 335-336, AOT.

<sup>280</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 October 1900.

<sup>281</sup> W Heyn's report, "*Timber in Tasmania*", was delivered at a meeting of The Royal Society of Tasmania and reported in the *Tasmanian News* of 7 June 1901.

<sup>282</sup> *Examiner*, 28 May 1901.

<sup>283</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 20 April 1906, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, pp. 817-825, AOT.

<sup>284</sup> R Sticht to Chairman and Board of Directors, 20 April 1904, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 783, AOT.

As the local timber resources diminished, a network of bush tramways was built to access the outlying stands at Howard's Plains, Lynch's Creek and Hall's Creek.<sup>285</sup> A wooden tramway was constructed north along the Queen River Valley, towards Lyell Comstock, and was retained for accessing wood reserves once supplies had run out elsewhere.<sup>286</sup> After the Princess River and Lynchford areas to the south of Queenstown had been cut out by 1913, the focus reverted to the Howard's Plains and Lake Margaret areas, which supplied most of the timber until 1923, after which time the supply of firewood became 'very precarious.'<sup>287</sup> The last significant stands of easily accessible timber to be cut along the Abt railway were opened up at Amber Creek in 1923 and at Starting Creek in 1930.<sup>288</sup> The closure of the Howard's Plains operations in 1923 necessitated the Company's moving of its woodcutting activities further afield to the Henty River area, midway along the Strahan to Zeehan Railway. Here the Company worked large tracts of bushland for many years, some it purchased,<sup>289</sup> and other areas it occupied by Exclusive Forest Permit, which gave it rights to harvest timber from specified areas.<sup>290</sup>

One of the many advantages of amalgamating with the North Mount Lyell Company had been the access gained to the substantial stands of timber located along the twenty-eight mile North Mount Lyell line, which linked the Linda Valley and Kelly Basin, on Macquarie Harbour. Over the years a number of horse drawn tramways were built to link the railway with the outlying stands of timber. Extending its reach in 1914, the Mount Lyell Company purchased the steam launch *Lynx* and a lighter, to facilitate access to the stands of timber that grew about the shores of Macquarie Harbour.<sup>291</sup> The logs were carried to Kelly Basin and loaded onto the railway wagons for transport to the Linda railhead. Once the timber supplies had been exhausted, the line was progressively closed; the Kelly Basin to Darwin section in 1925 and the Darwin to Linda section in 1928.<sup>292</sup> The opening of the West Coast Road, between Queenstown and Hobart, on 19 November 1932, opened up large tracts of timbered country.

<sup>285</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 2 April 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/322, pp. 765A-767, AOT.

<sup>286</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 16 October 1908, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pp. 193-194, AOT.

<sup>287</sup> R Murray to Company Secretary, 28 December 1923, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, p. 414, AOT.

<sup>288</sup> R Murray to Secretary for Lands, 5 April 1930, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/684, p. 159, AOT.

<sup>289</sup> R Murray to A Bingham, Solicitor, 19 September 1927, Staff Letters, NS 1711/559, p. 96, AOT.

<sup>290</sup> R Murray to Conservator of Forests, 7 May 1930, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/684, p. 193, AOT.

<sup>291</sup> B Sawyer to Company Secretary, 19 June 1914, File 5/1/5, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>292</sup> L Rae, *The Abt Railway, Tasmania's West Coast Wilderness Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 2003, p.82.

Exclusive timber cutting permits were eventually granted to the Company after some haggling with the Conservator of Forests over access issues and the need for scenery preservation belts.<sup>293</sup>

Conservation of forests and scenic areas during the early mining years on the West Coast was minimal. The wholesale destruction of the landscape was condoned by the need to develop mineral resources and create jobs. Isolated from the Hobart-based bureaucracy, the miners often undertook clearing works, whether by fire or timber cutting, well before the authorities were aware of the activities. Lacking in vision, the early settlers and Town Boards gave little thought to town planning principles or to the preservation of bushland. District Surveyor, David Jones, had surveyed one of the earliest reserves in the Mount Lyell region. It comprised a 766 acre Pine Forest Reserve, located on the banks of the Queen River, at the crossing of the Strahan to Lynch's Creek track. The land was duly proclaimed for the 'preservation and growth of timber.'<sup>294</sup> Some years later part of this land was set aside for the township of Lynchford and the remainder was logged by the Mount Lyell Company.

In a belated attempt to preserve areas of bushland close to towns, the local town boards and progress associations sought to have Botanical Garden Reserves declared at Kelly Basin<sup>295</sup> and at Lynchford.<sup>296</sup> The setting aside of the land for scenery and forest preservation purposes, particularly in the Lyell region, was viewed by the mining population as temporary. It considered any restrictions should be overridden as and when an economic use for the land was found. For example, a year after the proclamation of the Botanical Reserve at Lynchford, the May Gold Mining Company applied to erect a battery at the Princess Falls, which was considered to be the most scenic spot within the reserve. Upon investigating complaints concerning the matter, the Mines Department revoked the Company's permit to place the machinery on the site. In contrast to its comments on forestry depletion four years earlier, the decision drew a bitter comment from the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*. The paper observed that when 'it boils itself down to utility versus ornamentation the answer can only be the one way, remembering that we are in a mining district absolutely and solely, and that destruction and devastation of forest land in the past has not called forth any protest.'<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> R Murray to S Steane, Conservator of Forests, 14 July 1933, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/686, pp. 332-335, AOT.

<sup>294</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 October 1884, p. 1419.

<sup>295</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 1 April 1901.

<sup>296</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 July 1903, p. 719.

<sup>297</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 December 1904.

The promotion of tourism in the western districts was aided by the formation of the West Coast Tourist Association in Zeehan during November 1907.<sup>298</sup> In Queenstown the Mount Lyell Tourist Association was formed in May the following year, its aim to promote the local tourist features.<sup>299</sup> From afar, the Royal Society of Tasmania exhibited a strong interest in the region and pressed for the preservation of the scenery along the Gordon River.<sup>300</sup> In time the tourist associations gained sufficient political clout to place pressure on the local business interests and industries involved in the despoiling of the countryside. The government's embargo on timber harvesting on the banks of the Gordon River and its tributaries riled the timber men. They believed the argument advanced by tourism bodies to be a furphy, responding that 'the industry should not be paralysed for what is practically a myth on the West Coast.'<sup>301</sup>

The issue of conservation of scenic values was further put to the test in January 1916 when the government rejected the Broken Hill Proprietary Company's request to mine the Marble Cliffs on the Gordon River. The Company proposed to ship limestone to its Newcastle iron smelters. The anti-development stance adopted by the various tourist associations received hostile criticism from the Strahan Council, the Strahan Marine Board and the local member of parliament for Darwin, Ben Watkins, who castigated the government for its decision. An editorial appearing in the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* confirmed the strong pro-industrial attitude that prevailed on the West Coast, and expressed the population's intolerance of southern interference in its affairs:

If undertakings not to necessarily disfigure the Gordon River are given as many leases as possible should be granted to quarry limestone along its banks, so that we may have a wider field of industrial activity on the West Coast, rather than natural wealth lying idle and a scenic river preserved to abandoned grandeur in order to gratify the aesthetic sense of a few people who have done very little good and may do a great deal of harm.<sup>302</sup>

The rugged grandeur of the countryside and the perfect reflections viewed from the major rivers on the West Coast were unique. With the assistance of the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau, the boat trip up the Gordon River, famous for its Huon pines, was promoted as a journey into wonderland, in Tasmania's "Lost Province."<sup>303</sup> However, aside from the Gordon River, preserving the scenery at the cost of foregoing timber-cutting operations was not an option for Sticht. He fought to cut timber alongside the Abt Railway. He took a pragmatic approach, stating 'we will not be

<sup>298</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 November 1907.

<sup>299</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 May 1908.

<sup>300</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 July 1908.

<sup>301</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 January 1911.

<sup>302</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 January 1915.

<sup>303</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 February 1916.

justified, from a commercial point of view, paying much attention to the scenery on the line, as long as the trees afford us cheaper fuel than the importation of coal.’<sup>304</sup> The mounting public criticism of the wholesale destruction of the native forests and the erosion of the State’s tourism values slowly replaced the devil-may-care attitude of industrial enterprises like the Mount Lyell Company.

The tourist associations assumed a politically active role. Sticht, as Patron of the Mount Lyell Tourist Association for some years, assisted it in its endeavours to build playgrounds and picnic areas. His successor, Russell Murray, encountered a stronger and less subservient Association upon seeking to access the timber along the railway near the King River. After an ongoing dispute, Murray adopted a conciliatory approach. He offered to leave all timber that grew within ten chains of the line, preserving the forest scenery as viewed from the railway carriage.<sup>305</sup> Murray’s offer was accepted. The Company gained access to its timber reserves ‘subject to the proviso that a strip of land 10 chains in width along the river front is not interfered with.’<sup>306</sup> While Murray pursued the economic interests of his Company, he was mindful of the barren landscape. On receiving a gift of wattle seeds he advised the sender that he would plant them in the hope that someday they would be ‘flowering successfully on the hills.’<sup>307</sup>

## Conclusions

The contrasting roles played by the two general managers, capably assisted in the background by a most experienced Board of Directors, were paramount to the success of the Mount Lyell operations during the period studied. Sticht had arrived on the West Coast with a ready-made aura as a leading proponent in the development of pyritic smelting. Despite the adversities of isolation, inclement weather, poor communication and lacking transport systems, Sticht met all the challenges. The smelters were designed, built and operational within fifteen months of his arrival, the pyritic process had proven a resounding success in the treatment of the complex copper ores. Sticht’s promotion to manager came as ‘high appreciation of his ability, and of the success which has attended the Company’s reduction operations under his administration.’<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 11 June 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/323, pp. 13-14, AOT.

<sup>305</sup> R Murray to LG Irby, Conservator of Forests, 16 October 1923, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/680, pp. 550-551, AOT.

<sup>306</sup> R Murray to EA Counsel, Secretary for Lands, 24 December 1923, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/680, p. 730, AOT.

<sup>307</sup> R Murray to P Fowler, 2 December 1925, Personal Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/62, p. 119, AOT.

<sup>308</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1897, p. 10, Queenstown.



Indicative of Sticht's brilliance and sense of timing was his 13 November 1902 achievement of smelting copper without the use of fuel, the purest form of pyritic smelting and a world first. Not only had Sticht fully explored the properties of the ores smelted, and saved the Company considerable money by reducing its substantial consumption of coke fuel, he had performed the "unkindest cut of all" in sinking the growing challenge of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company.<sup>309</sup> Sticht had provided his Company with the key to dominating the Mount Lyell copper field, which his directors accepted with open hands. With access gained to the high-grade North Mount Lyell ore, the longevity of the two mines was assured for many years to come, as were the dividends paid to the expectant shareholders.

The "hands-on" role of the general manager was threatened in September 1912 when the Company's directors moved to relocate Sticht to Melbourne and to appoint a local superintendent to manage operations.<sup>310</sup> Basil Sawyer, the former Acting Chief Inspector of Mines in New South Wales, was appointed to the position without reference to Sticht.<sup>311</sup> The move proved controversial as Sawyer had served on the commission to review mining methods and safety at Mount Lyell, arriving in Queenstown the day the North Mount Lyell Mine caught fire. Blainey contends the appointment to have been foolish. It created the erroneous idea within the community that Sawyer had been offered the job in return for silence.<sup>312</sup> Common sense prevailed. Sticht was not relocated. Sawyer's overall influence in Company affairs proved low-key and he eventually resigned in April 1920.<sup>313</sup>

Russell Murray's rise to the job of general manager, following Sticht's death in April 1922, had evolved over twenty-two years. He served a long apprenticeship working and living near the mines. During this time he demonstrated a number of important management skills, gaining the confidence of all those around him. He assumed office at a time of falling copper prices, low reserves of high-grade copper, inefficient work practices and a general lack of confidence. The workers had endured tough times and had suffered a loss in their working conditions following the Arbitration Court's decision in the previous June. Murray did not enjoy the same early assistance provided to Sticht by the Board of Directors for it comprised 'elderly,

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<sup>309</sup> A Mellor letter to R Sticht, 19 November 1902, Mount Lyell Correspondence, Non State records, AOT.

<sup>310</sup> Directors' Meeting 26 September 1912, File 2/3/5, pp. 116-117, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>311</sup> Directors' Meeting 14 November 1912, File 2/3/5, p. 121, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>312</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 229.

<sup>313</sup> Directors' Meeting 22 April 1920, File 2/3/9, p. 91, University of Melbourne Archives

cautious men who not only lacked the drive, but the large share interest in the company which characterized the early directorate.<sup>314</sup>

In light of the above circumstances, Murray's transformation of the Company's fortunes is meritorious. He successfully instigated massive change in all aspects of the Company's operations and demonstrated an innovative approach by adopting modern technologies and implementing best practice throughout the works. He enabled the Company to be competitive on the world copper market despite its physical isolation and high transport costs. By the end of 1935 the Company's position was very sound. Recent advancements included the development of the West Lyell open cut mine, the use of an electric shovel to improve loading and further reductions in production costs. Demand worldwide for copper was increasing. The directors regarded 'the results now being achieved at Mount Lyell as a technical triumph, and our Officers through a very trying period have responded to the able leadership of our General Manager, Mr. R. M. Murray, in praiseworthy fashion.'<sup>315</sup>

Both Sticht and Murray wielded considerable power, at state and federal government levels, such was the importance of the Company to the welfare of Tasmania. From their position of isolation within Tasmania's "Lost Province" both were virtual rulers over men and nature. They flaunted authority, sometimes deliberately, accepting "low level" admonishment. The price of short-term profits and employment was the long-term damage to the environment. Patsy Crawford claims that all Murray ever wanted was 'what was best for the mine and the company.'<sup>316</sup> An example of the contradictions and paradoxes arose in the early 1990s when the Queenstown community protested loudly against the proposed revegetation of the lunar landscape about Mount Lyell. It argued that the industrially-degraded hills and valleys were 'the most visible, and hence most frequently acknowledged, artefact of the community's culturally rich mining past.'<sup>317</sup>

The following chapter studies the marine environment about Macquarie Harbour from a transport perspective. It examines the early difficulties in overcoming the shallow access into Macquarie Harbour and observes the rise to dominance by the Mount Lyell Company, as it assumed control of shipping and port activities about the harbour.

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<sup>314</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 269.

<sup>315</sup> MLMRC Report of Annual Meeting held 13 December 1935, Queenstown.

<sup>316</sup> Crawford, *King – The story of a river*, p. 77.

<sup>317</sup> Sustainable Development Advisory Council, *State of the Environment Tasmania – Volume 1: Conditions and Trends*, Hobart, Department of Environment and Land Management, 1996, Cultural Heritage 6.5.

## CHAPTER 3: SAILING INTO DIFFICULTY 1893 - 1935

### Introduction

By the end of 1892 the port of Strahan had grown to become an important outlet for the developing West Coast mineral areas of Zeehan, Dundas and Mount Lyell. Access to its newly expanded railway wharf was limited to the “mosquito” fleet of coastal traders, that were restricted in size due to the shallow depth over the treacherous sandbar guarding the entry into Macquarie Harbour. Resolving the problem of the sand bar had proved far from simple. The government had previously employed the experienced New Zealand engineer, Charles Napier Bell, to assess the problem and provide a solution. His report, completed in April 1890, had identified the need for constructing substantial breakwaters and training walls to overcome the immediate shipping problems. These innovative works did not come with a cheap price tag. The government balked at committing the £149,236 identified by Bell to complete the works.<sup>1</sup> The following year a private proposal submitted by Arthur Lawder was briefly entertained. Lawder would effect the necessary harbour works, including an upgrade of the Strahan wharf, in return for charging a toll on all freight moved across the wharf. A strong public rejection of the monopolistic scheme saw the ambitious plan fail in the Legislative Council.

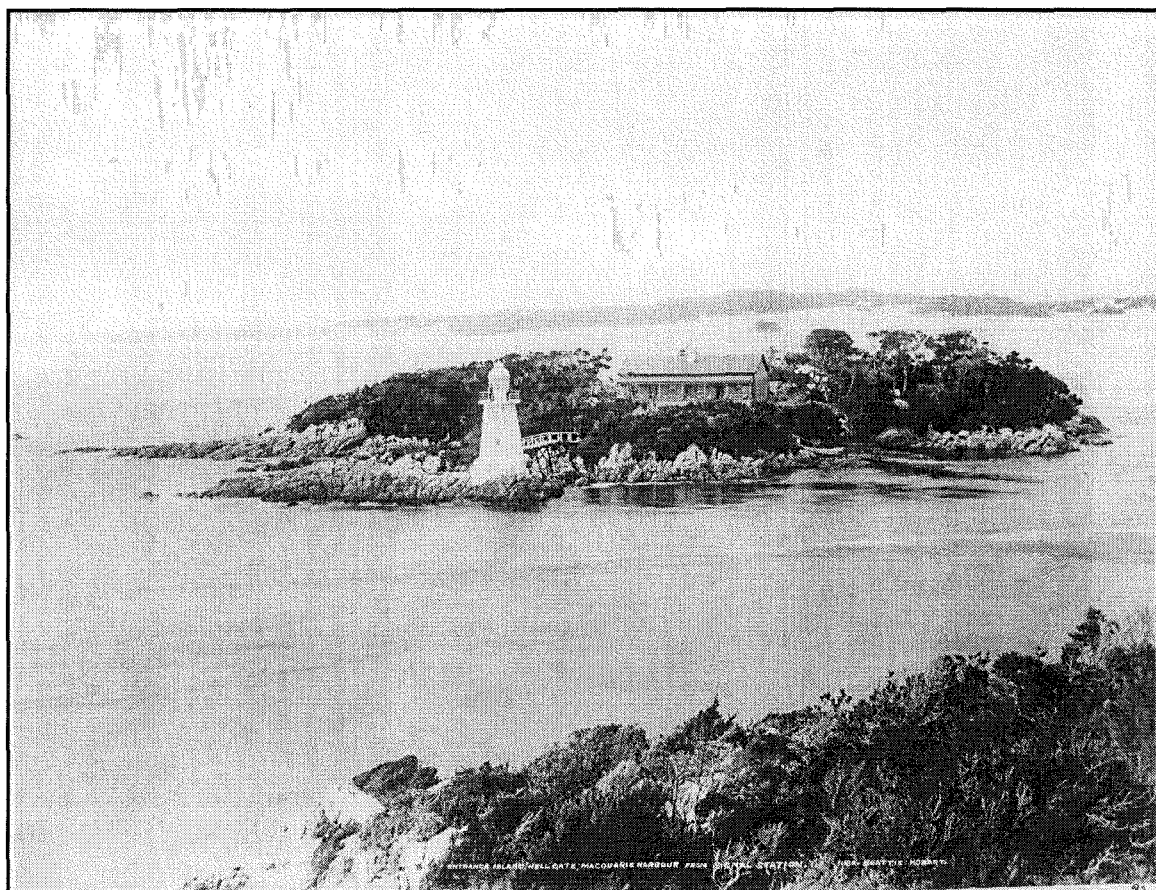
The government’s inability to resolve the situation received heavy criticism following the loss of two sailing ships on the bar in December 1891 and February 1892, the events highlighting the dangerous situation that existed for ships visiting the region. Looking for alternatives rather than effecting the harbour improvements, the government had considered proposals to build a railway to the region, to provide a direct link to a deepwater port elsewhere in the colony. Three proposals emerged during 1891, with outlets at Burnie, Launceston and Hobart. Each proposition faced major construction issues in overcoming the difficult terrain between the ports and the mineral fields. Consequently, none of the schemes progressed. Government procrastination followed, which did little to help the confidence of the promoters and investors looking to develop mining and smelting enterprises within the region. In particular, the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company desired to see the entrance into Macquarie Harbour resolved before it committed to developing its copper mine, smelters and railway. In early 1893 the American engineering consultant, Edward

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<sup>1</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Entrance to Macquarie Harbour: Report by C. Napier Bell, 1890, paper 61, p. 5.



**ENTRANCE TO MACQUARIE HARBOUR, LOOKING EAST**



**ENTRANCE ISLAND AND LIGHTHOUSE – c. 1900**

Peters, had advised that, in order to compete with copper producers elsewhere around the world, the Company required a competitive shipping service and a port where 'large steamers can enter at any time of the tide.'<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines the ongoing growth of the port of Strahan, which had been driven by the expansion of mining activities at Zeehan and export of the silver ores, bullion and freight over its busy wharves. The subsequent developments at Mount Lyell, and the establishment of the temporary wharf at Teepookana, had further strengthened activity through the port, albeit temporarily. Pressure mounted on the government to open the harbour to larger freighters. Reasons behind the government's indecision to commit to spending a large sum of money within the isolated region are outlined, as are the factors that eventually drove it to recall Napier Bell to update his original proposal. Under considerable duress, the government eventually committed to the partial adoption of Bell's scheme. It reconstituted the Marine Board of Strahan and empowered it to administer the task. The new Board was soon embroiled in controversy. The attempts by Edward Miles to dominate proceedings, which eventually led to his downfall, are detailed, as is the Board's long and frustrating fight to remain solvent. The chapter identifies positive examples of innovation applied during the construction phase and the ongoing harbour improvements.

Domination is the key theme of the chapter. The Union Steam Ship Company (USS Co.) sought and gained early control of the shipping services to and from the harbour. For a brief period the Tasmanian Government Railways dominated traffic emanating from Zeehan and Dundas, which was railed to the Strahan wharves. The port of Strahan prospered through its temporary monopoly over all freight shipped in and out of the harbour. Within a few years of its establishment in 1893, the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company rose to prominence and challenged the existing shipping empires. It achieved competitive freight costs through its aggressive negotiations with the USS Co. and dominated shipping activities through its wharf facilities at Regatta Point. The Company later assumed control of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's port and railway operations at Kelly Basin. Through clever manoeuvring, the Company negotiated valuable concessions with government to ensure it retained the long-term ownership of its railway. The Mount Lyell Company's systematic rise to dominate the marine transport systems and facilities within the region are fully examined in this chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> ED Peters report to the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, 15 May 1893, Queenstown, p. 4.

### **Procrastination and Frustration – the Macquarie Harbour Improvement Scheme**

This section examines the ongoing problems encountered by government, shipping companies and the West Coast community in dealing with the harbour access before the 1898 decision was taken to partially implement Napier Bell's scheme. It also looks at the emergence of the USS Co., which had acquired control of the shipping services into and out of the harbour.

The year 1893 proved to be a busy time for the developing port of Strahan and the Zeehan silverfield to the north. Both profited by the completion of the Strahan to Zeehan railway the previous year. Shipping activity increased to the extent that Strahan's primitive wharf facilities were severely taxed. The combined value of the port's imports and exports had grown from £65,670 16s.11d. in 1892 to £96,847 18s.11d. in 1893, making Strahan the fourth busiest in Tasmania, behind Launceston, Hobart and Devonport.<sup>3</sup> The following year proved busier still, the returns increasing to £149,609, moving Strahan to third on the list of ports, ahead of Devonport.<sup>4</sup>

The prospects for the port of Strahan were bright. Reports of newly-discovered ore deposits in the feeder districts of Zeehan, Dundas and Mount Lyell had become a regular occurrence. In addition to the growing mineral trade, the volume of general freight handled by the port rose sharply. Railway contractors, commercial entrepreneurs and new mining companies all channelled their growing activities through the port. Isolated from road and rail contact with the rest of Tasmania, the area was totally dependent on the port of Strahan for the supply of all commercial, industrial and domestic hardware. Large quantities of foodstuffs had to be regularly imported to cater for the region's rapidly increasing population. Within the sheltered confines of Long Bay, 'numerous small steamers were buzzing in and out of the harbour like flies round a honey pot, often berthed 2 and 3 abreast of the wharf.'<sup>5</sup>

A significant factor behind Strahan's improved freight figures for 1894 was the development of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's temporary wharf facilities at Teepookana. Sited on the southern banks of the King River, four miles upriver from Macquarie Harbour, and eight miles from Strahan, the small settlement of Teepookana had been established around September 1894, before the commencement of

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<sup>3</sup> JPPP, Statistics of Tasmania for 1893, 1894, paper 89, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac*, Imports, Exports, and Duties, 1894 (p. 273), 1895 (p. 253) and 1896 (p. 257).

<sup>5</sup> J Ware, *Strahan, Macquarie Harbour*, Facsimile of 1908 edition, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneer's Memorial Museum, 1981, p. 18.

construction works on the railway through to Mount Lyell.<sup>6</sup> The decision to develop Teepookana was a temporary solution, forced on the Company by a shortfall in capital. Port activities at Teepookana are discussed later in this chapter. Freight was shipped between Strahan and Teepookana until the opening of the railway through to Regatta Point on 1 November 1899. The port facilities at Teepookana were closed a fortnight after this date. All goods to and from Mount Lyell were then loaded and unloaded at the Company's Regatta Point terminus.<sup>7</sup>

The commencement of smelting activities at Mount Lyell had produced an immediate impact on the port of Strahan. The value of exports rose from £56,894 in 1896 to £332,932 in 1897 and the imports had increased from £102,936 to £131,086. Overall trade rose from £159,830 to £464,018 in one year. The figures for 1898 showed yet another improved result. The port's overall trade figures jumped to £645,570, considerably shortening the once vast gap enjoyed by the Island's two major ports of Hobart (£1,241,741) and Launceston (£1,209,066). Strahan had completely outstripped the fourth ranked port, Devonport, which returned £221,310 for the year. The stunning increase in trade highlighted the growing impact of Strahan and the western mining districts on the Tasmanian economy.<sup>8</sup>

In normal circumstances, the increases in Strahan's shipping activity should have created grounds for unbridled optimism. This was not the case. The treacherous bar at the entrance into Macquarie Harbour had continued to cause safety concerns and severely limit the size of boats entering the harbour. Successive governments had procrastinated on the matter, and did not commit the funds to undertake the necessary works identified by C Napier Bell in his 1890 report.<sup>9</sup> The cash-strapped Marine Board of Strahan was limited in its ability to rectify the problems. It merely made cosmetic improvements to the harbour. Shipping delays were commonplace, caused by indifferent tides, rough seas and poor weather conditions. Freight charges in and out of Strahan were considerably higher than other Tasmanian regional ports. It could not accommodate the larger coastal and overseas ships. The apparent disproportionate funding spent on the smaller trading ports along the North West Coast did little to appease growing hostility within the West Coast community. From 1881 to 1896 the

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<sup>6</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1894, pp. 6-7, Queenstown. At the time the port was referred to as "The Bar Rock."

<sup>7</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1900, p. 24, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>8</sup> *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac*, Imports, Exports, and Duty Collected, 1898 (p. 259), 1899 (p. 265) and 1900 (p. 267).

<sup>9</sup> JPPP, Entrance to Macquarie Harbour, Report by C. Napier Bell, 1890, paper 61.

port of Devonport had received £53,516, Emu Bay (Burnie) £44,500, Stanley £25,210, Table Cape (Wynyard) £10,220 and Leven (Ulverstone) £7,934. The total amount allocated to Strahan during the same period was a mere £6,014, of which only £1,714 had been allocated since 1893.<sup>10</sup>

Supporting the push to increase the funding for West Coast projects, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* criticised the poor results obtained from spending large sums on port improvements at Wynyard, Leven and Devonport. The *Herald* fully endorsed the contents of Napier Bell's 1890 report, reasoning it had been rejected because of the high cost of the venture and the perceived risk that the stone to be used on the breakwater would sink into the deep sand. The paper considered that much valuable knowledge could be gained from the North West Coast experiences and the Strahan works should not be delayed as 'the commerce of the West Coast has now reached dimensions that justify a considerable outlay.'<sup>11</sup>

Shipping operations in and out of Macquarie Heads were costly, particularly for the mining industry. In nearly every instance overseas cargo had to be transshipped via the deep water ports of Hobart, Launceston or on the mainland. This added to the government's growing quandary. If it opened up the port to the large ocean-going vessels, there was every likelihood that Hobart and Launceston would be bypassed and the West Coast would become little more than a provincial outpost of Victoria. Fighting against the harbour improvements, Hobart based politician, Charles Davenport Hoggins, waged an emotive campaign based on the motto "Tasmania for the Tasmanians." He warned voters that the removal of the Macquarie Bar 'would be one of the rashest undertakings that could be proposed by any man who had the interest of Tasmania at heart.'<sup>12</sup>

Caught in the bickering between those with vested regional commercial interests and the parochial politicians was a frustrated West Coast community, continuing to suffer an expensive, unpredictable and potentially life-threatening shipping service. The prevailing arguments had largely ignored the safety issues confronting the travelling public and crews. The memories of three wrecks in the early 1890's had long faded, primarily because there had been no loss of life. The loss of the brigantines *Sea Bird* (1891) and *Circe* (1892) had been partially blamed on the general lack of manoeuvrability of sailing vessels in difficult situations. The 19 September 1894 grounding and subsequent sinking of the 191 ton steamer *Devon* was a different matter.

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<sup>10</sup> JPPP, Ports, Harbours, and Wharves: Expenditure Upon, 1897, paper 49, pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 November 1896.



The accident came as a result of a build-up of silt on the bar.<sup>13</sup> The subsequent Court of Enquiry exonerated Captain Reid and his crew from blame. In an attempt to avoid a repetition of the accident, the Stipendiary Magistrate, Edward H Fowell, recommended that the masters of all vessels should be provided with information as to the depth of water on the bar at the various stages of the tide.<sup>14</sup>

The safety aspect of the harbour became a major concern as the number of near accidents at Macquarie Heads continued to rise. Further warnings and recommendations flowed from subsequent enquiries but all fell on the politicians' deaf ears. The temporary groundings and the ongoing occurrences of boats bumping across the bar greatly frustrated and alarmed the West Coast community. Fears that the entrance was becoming shallower gained credence with the temporary stranding of the *ss Australia* on 10 September 1896 and then the *ss Glenelg* on 7 November the same year. Commenting on the *Glenelg* mishap, the *Herald* noted that not only was West Coast trade vitally important, but so was the safety of passengers.<sup>15</sup> On the *Australia* incident, the paper observed that the rescue facilities at the Heads were lacking and there was also a general inability to render practical assistance to marooned vessels because of the isolated nature of the region. These factors were potentially life threatening. The *Herald* concluded 'there is but one remedy, viz, remove the bar.'<sup>16</sup>

Adding further pressure to government was the strong railway lobby comprising a number of consortia, each hoping to construct railways to serve the West Coast. If an efficient railway was built, it was unlikely that the government would be required to effect the harbour improvements. In the latter half of 1896 a number of ambitious railway schemes were placed before Parliament. These proposals are discussed in Chapter 5. Also before Parliament on 28 August the same year was the Mount Lyell Company's formal request to continue the use of its temporary terminus at Teepookana. Parliament approved the request, passing the *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1896*, which required the Company to extend the railway to or near Strahan within five years. On 17 October 1896 the Parliament also commissioned a survey for a road to link Launceston and the West Coast.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> G Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, ACT, Navarine Publishing, 1993, pp. 94-97.

<sup>14</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 October 1894, p. 1892.

<sup>15</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 November 1896.

<sup>16</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 November 1896.

<sup>17</sup> JPPP, Route to the West Coast, Report of Mr Surveyor Innes upon the track from Mole Creek to Rosebery, Mount Reid, 1897, paper 43.

The Hobart to West Coast railway proposal was attractive to government, as it included a promise to build large smelters near Hobart. The Burnie railway was also inviting, as it would open up the mining fields between Waratah and Zeehan. In 1897 further applications were lodged with government to construct railways to and within the West Coast. Frederick Back, the General Manager of the Tasmanian Government Railways, had previously advised government that a line from Burnie would have a detrimental effect on the revenue earnings of its Strahan to Zeehan railway.<sup>18</sup> The railway would compete for the Zeehan mineral traffic, reduce the volume being carried on the line through to Strahan and substantially reduce the trade over the Strahan wharf. Back also considered the railway from Hobart would prove a liability as it would not be economic to rail the unprocessed ore such a long distance.<sup>19</sup> The construction of this railway threatened the viability of the existing operations at Mount Lyell and the new proposal being advanced by the North Mount Lyell Copper Company. Both the Mount Lyell concerns heavily depended on an upgrading to shipping services into Macquarie Harbour and neither would threaten the government's railway operations into Zeehan. These issues, together with the added pressures being exerted by the politically active Hobart and Launceston Railway Leagues, proved added reasons for the government's delay in committing to the harbour works.

Having achieved little success the previous year, the *Herald* again attempted to break the stalemate and force the government's hand. In June 1897 it advocated a simpler and cheaper solution to the harbour problem, seeking the partial adoption of Bell's 1890 recommendations. The paper considered the construction of a single breakwater<sup>20</sup> on the southern side of Hell's Gates would concentrate the out-flowing current and scour a channel through the offending sandbar, improving the depth by perhaps five or six feet. The *Herald* listed similar examples that had been effectively employed at Greymouth and Westport in New Zealand and noted that large volumes of suitable rock could be obtained close to the works-site. It estimated the total cost of the project could be limited to £25,000.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> JPPP, V.D.L. Company's Waratah and Zeehan Railway: Report of the General Manager of Railways on probable effect on the Government Railways of the Construction of the Railway from Waratah to Zeehan, with a Branch to Lyell, 1897, paper 60.

<sup>19</sup> JPPP, The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore Reduction Company's Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1896, pp. 43-44, paper 80.

<sup>20</sup> The term 'mole' was used particularly in the early stages of the project but it was used sparingly in later years. For this reason I have referred to the outer stone wall as a breakwater, unless the term 'mole' has been used directly in a quote.

<sup>21</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 June 1897.

The July 1897 announcement by the Mount Lyell Company that it intended to increase its smelting capacity to ten-furnaces added fuel to the *Herald's* argument. The expansion of the Company's operations promised to generate a substantial increase in shipping activities. The paper observed that 'if the rulers of Tasmania's destiny can but rise to the occasion, divest themselves of petty jealousies and local ideas, and grasp the situation in a thoroughly national and broad-minded spirit, the long-delayed work of opening the only West Coast harbour to fair-sized boats will be commenced in earnest at a very early date.'<sup>22</sup>

The government's dilemmas grew. The proposed scale of the harbour works identified by Bell and Lawder were extensive and were considered to be a far greater gamble than those undertaken along the North West Coast. The project was made all the more difficult by its sheer isolation and the practical difficulties associated with working under such trying conditions. Local weather patterns were extremely unpredictable and flooding was prevalent. A combination of heavy rains, strong winds and irregular tidal conditions could see the water level rise up to six feet at the Heads, well above the normal maximum range of three feet. Further complicating the issue was the lack of detailed mapping of the waterways, particularly the extensive shoaling inside the harbour and the actual depth of sand over the bar.<sup>23</sup>

The *Herald* played an integral role in galvanising community support for the harbour works. In early August 1897 a committee of twelve delegates, including three from Strahan, three from Queenstown, one from Gormanston, four from Zeehan and Secretary, AG Prater, was formed. In a unified approach, the delegates collated information that identified the existing trade and future prospects of the region, aiming to present the details before Parliament and the country generally. The wider West Coast population readily embraced the Committee's activities. Subscriptions were sought from within the community to defray the costs of the honorary delegates. The *Herald* endorsed the action, stating 'it is the people's fight, and the people should be only too ready to provide the sinews of war.'<sup>24</sup>

The committee's report provided comprehensive statistics and highlighted the considerable revenue raised by government on the West Coast from general taxes, customs, rents from gold and mining licences, profits on the Strahan-Zeehan railway and from the region's mail service. The value of mining exports, particularly those

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<sup>22</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 August 1897.

<sup>23</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour: Report on Proposed Works for Deepening the Bar, by C. Napier Bell, 1898, paper 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 August 1897.

emanating from Mount Lyell, combined with the vast potential for growth within the western mining region, were highlighted as was the increasing trade through Macquarie Harbour. The figures confirmed the comparatively low amount spent by the government on general shipping improvements on the West Coast. The delegation requested that a sum of £40,000 be set aside for constructing a 3,960 feet long breakwater at Macquarie Heads. The submission highlighted the importance of the “rough and rugged West Coast” in providing future welfare and prosperity to the island colony. Importantly, the region possessed considerable political clout. Its total population in 1897 was estimated to be 13,500, a substantial increase on the previous figure of 4,000 recorded in 1891.<sup>25</sup>

The government’s indifference to the documentation placed before it by the Macquarie Harbour Bar Delegation disappointed its proponents. The northern and north-western interests in the colony clearly supported the West Coast push to improve its shipping amenities, whereas the southerners were lukewarm. Government rejection of the proposal was predictable given the foreshadowed economic benefits conferred on Hobart by the Great Western Railway and the proposed smelters. The *Herald* described the negative response by the Acting-Premier, Sir Philip Fysh, to be ‘diplomacy of the weak-kneed and hesitating kind that is a long way removed from far-seeing statesmanship.’<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the difficult access into Macquarie Harbour, the western seaboard lacked reliable navigational aids. Maps of the sea routes were deficient as many rocky reefs did not appear on the old charts. Unless the Admiralty could be convinced to undertake the project, new maps would not be produced. Attempting to alleviate some of the safety issues, the government allocated £8,000 in its 1897 Public Works proposals for a lighthouse at Cape Sorell. The tender for the works was awarded on 9 May 1898 to Duff Brothers of Hobart.<sup>27</sup> The lighthouse comprised a brick tower 100 feet high and a 13 feet tall chamber containing the light and clockwork. Three substantial brick dwellings were built to accommodate Lighthouse Superintendent Jaques and his two assistants, Messers Colsen and Phillips. Its isolated location on the headland to the west of the entrance to Macquarie Harbour required a one and three-quarter mile long wooden tramway to carry the 1,400 tons of building materials between Pilot Bay, located a short distance to the west of Hells Gates, and the construction site.<sup>28</sup>

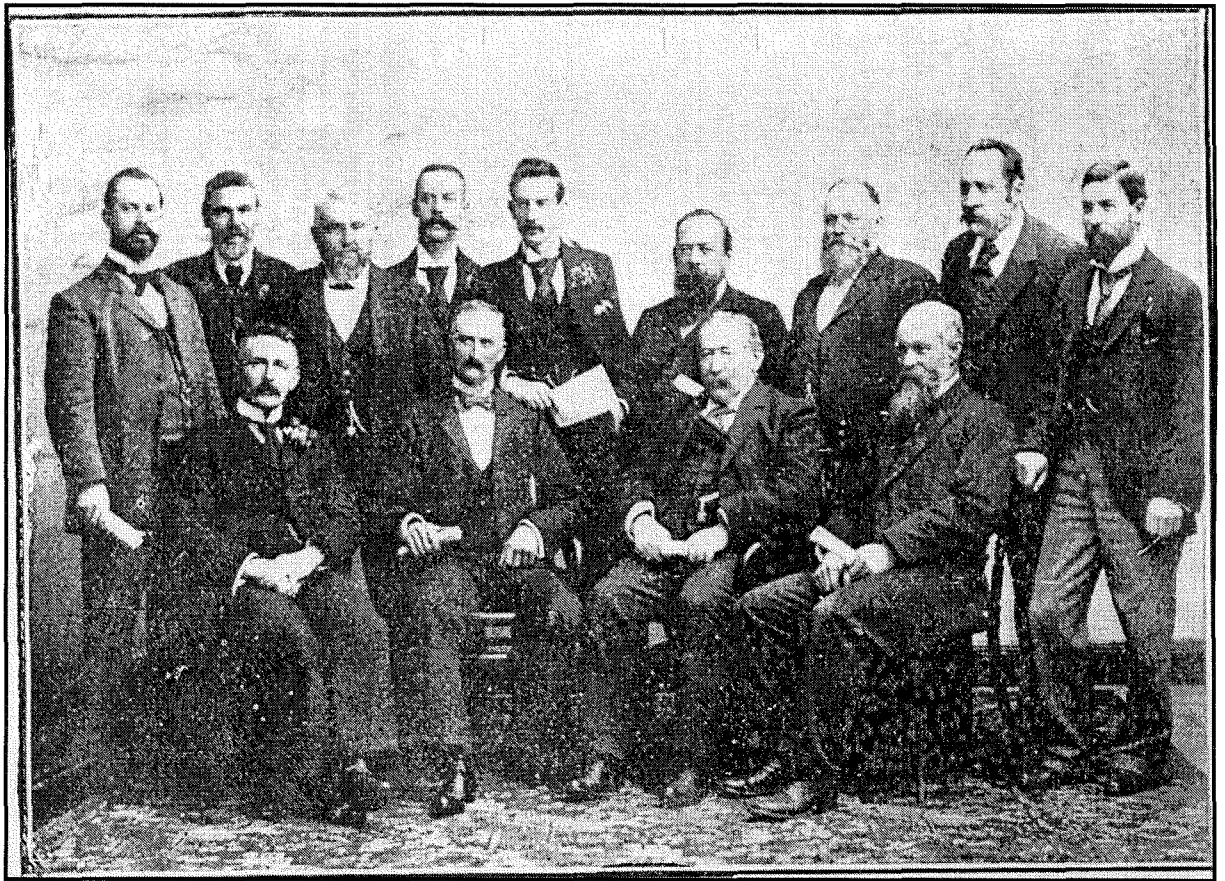
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<sup>25</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 August 1897.

<sup>26</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 August 1897.

<sup>27</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 14 July 1899.

<sup>28</sup> *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 4 October 1899.



MACQUARIE HARBOUR BAR DELEGATION 1898



OUTER HARBOUR QUARRY, BREAKWATER WORKS 1901

Although it had been unsuccessful in gaining an immediate commitment of money towards the bar works, the delegation had elicited a pledge from government for Napier Bell to provide a comprehensive survey, report and costing of the works. Blainey considers the commissioning of the second report from Bell to be superfluous.<sup>29</sup> However, given the questions raised by Lawder and others, the argument for a re-examination of the original plans was strong, if only to quell the lingering doubts as to the suitability of the proposed works. The announcement provided government with a politically expedient resolution to the matter and enabled it to bide valuable time, while the various outstanding railway issues were resolved. Bell arrived in Strahan on 23 November 1897, and stayed at Macquarie Heads for over five weeks to observe currents, water depths, tides and to test the suitability of the available rock fill.<sup>30</sup>

Bell reported that the bar had appeared to have altered little since the first survey undertaken by Lieutenant Philip King in 1819, it being a narrow ridge of sand connecting the great sand spits that extended to the beaches on either side. The bar varied in depth from eight feet six inches in summer during fine weather, to ten feet in winter or in rough weather, these measurements all being at low tide. Bell observed that, once the bar had been negotiated, entry into the harbour was made in deeper water until Bonnet Island. Here the navigable channel divided into two, the low-tide depth of the channels being as shallow as eight feet six inches for the next three miles. The final eight miles into Strahan was easy sailing, with the main channels being up to fifty feet in depth. Bell contended the flood and ebb tides caused the circulation of sand between the outer bar and inner shoals, depositing large volumes of sand on the problem areas. He noted that the high winds encountered along the coastline swept vast quantities of sand into the harbour due to the northern banks of Ocean Beach being denuded of vegetation.<sup>31</sup>

A confident Bell anticipated few difficulties in resolving the bar problem. He considered that the action of the tides, gales and floods would generate powerful currents to scour the channel. The water flow could be maximised by constructing two rock-fill breakwaters, one on each side of the narrow entrance channel. Abundant stone was located nearby on the western shore. Bell envisaged the rock could be transported across the channel via a bridge, 1830 feet long. It would feature a centre swing-section that, when open, would leave two 70 feet wide passages for vessels to pass on either

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<sup>29</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour: Report on Proposed Works for Deepening the Bar, By C Napier Bell, 1898, paper 2, p. 3.

side. The swing-bridge could be removed once construction works had been completed. To resolve the depth problems within the harbour, a long curved training wall was designed to concentrate the outward flowing water. This action would scour a deep channel. Bell sought to allay public skepticism of his innovative proposals by listing examples of successful breakwaters that had been used in difficult situations on the mainland and overseas. Unfortunately for government, Bell's revised report did little to resolve its dilemma. The works had escalated in cost from his 1890 figure of £149,236 to £195,149, due to increased breakwater works and the erection of an extra training wall near Entrance Island. Bell provided advice to the government on two wharf sites at Strahan, his preferred option being at East Strahan, where conditions were more sheltered than the West Strahan alternative.<sup>32</sup>

Released in late January 1898, Bell's report did not elicit a positive response from government, much to the disgust of the West Coast community. As a stalling tactic, the government merely opted to allocate £5,000 to dredge the bar.<sup>33</sup> This action was heavily criticised in Parliament by Captain Edward Miles, the Member for Glamorgan and a prominent Strahan identity. Ruling out the dredging idea as an abject waste of public money, Miles warned the government of the increased potential for a shipping disaster should Bell's works be delayed. Arguments heavily influenced by parochial bias were duly advanced. Alfred Crisp, the member for Hobart, stated that he could not support any risky expenditure on the Macquarie Harbour Bar until after a railway connection had been established between Hobart and the West Coast. Miles fully supported Bell's proposal, but believed his cost estimates to be high, advising Parliament 'he would be glad to get the contract at 10 per cent less than Bell's estimate.'<sup>34</sup>

Miles proved to be a staunch advocate of the bar works and managed to convince several of his colleagues of its worth. His strong maritime background and local experience provided him with a thorough wealth of knowledge of the West Coast's transport needs. He had previously owned a fleet of coastal steamers that had plied the coastline in the late 1880s before becoming involved with the family owned shipping firm, TA Reynolds and Company. The USS Co. had subsequently purchased the

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<sup>31</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour: Report on Proposed Works for Deepening the Bar, By C Napier Bell, 1898, paper 2.

<sup>32</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour: Report on Proposed Works for Deepening the Bar, By C Napier Bell, 1898, paper 2.

<sup>33</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals 1898-9, 1898, paper 46, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 July 1898.

holding in September 1896.<sup>35</sup> Miles had been a party to the contract for the construction of the Strahan to Zeehan railway in 1889 and in April 1892 was elected as the first Master Warden of the Marine Board of Strahan.<sup>36</sup> Miles would prove a very controversial character in the years to come. His involvement with the harbour works is discussed later in this chapter.

Failure to win the necessary support for Bell's project in Parliament led to well-attended public meetings in Zeehan and Queenstown to protest against the government's ongoing timidity, short-sightedness, and exasperating behaviour towards the West Coast. Bell believed the situation could be satisfactorily resolved by building a single breakwater.<sup>37</sup> The government remained silent. Its ongoing procrastination fuelled further hostility, made more bitter when disaster again beset the harbour, twice within two months. On 12 June 1898 the USS Company's vessel *ss Grafton* struck a sandbank inside the bar and, despite considerable efforts to save the boat, it eventually sank in the pounding surf. The second mishap occurred on 5 August 1898 when the new three-masted schooner, *Annie McDougall*, lost its rudder after hitting the bar. The boat succumbed to the relentless seas. Fortunately, no lives were lost in either incident but significant cargoes were damaged or lost. The *Grafton* was carrying railway and mining equipment for the Mount Lyell Company and the *Annie McDougall* was laden with a consignment of timber for the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's wharves at Kelly Basin.<sup>38</sup>

A special meeting of the Macquarie Harbour Bar Delegation was held at Strahan three days after the wrecking of the *Annie McDougall*. It attracted the attendance of local MHA's Edward Miles and Edward Mulcahy. Miles advised the meeting that a large number of his parliamentary colleagues now favoured the proposal to undertake the first portion of Bell's scheme during the current year. Miles considered that without the works 'there would soon be as much capital lying wasting about the Bar in wrecked ships as would construct the whole of the works required.'<sup>39</sup> Buoyed by the growing support, the meeting decided to send another delegation to Hobart to present a now strengthened case. The Queenstown based *Mount Lyell Standard* endorsed the proposal, believing it was appropriate to pressure the Ministry while the wrecks of the *Grafton* and *Annie McDougall* could be used to best advantage. The *Standard*

<sup>35</sup> AL Arbon, *A History of the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand 1875-1971*, South Australia, RH Parsons, 1973, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 26 April 1892, p. 937.

<sup>37</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 July 1898.

<sup>38</sup> Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, pp. 98-109.

<sup>39</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 August 1898.



prudently observed that 'hard facts apply to stereotyped phrases when delegations see Ministees [sic]. Increasing trade and population statistics become thread-worn after frequent use. Hoist the danger signal at the entrance to our port; it will command attention.'<sup>40</sup>

The second delegation to Hobart met with improved success, but only after extensive negotiations with the Premier, Sir Edward Braddon who initially sought to defray the cost of the works by recovering the money through increasing freight charges on the Strahan to Zeehan railway. It was finally resolved that the Marine Board of Strahan would be merged into a Harbour Trust, comprising two members from Strahan, Zeehan and Queenstown and four government nominees, totalling ten wardens in all. A sum of £60,000 was to be allocated to the Trust, at an annual interest rate of 3 per cent. The principal would be repaid from revenue appropriated from government returns on mines, lands, customs and railways. Napier Bell had previously advised the delegation that an amount of £60,000 would be sufficient to complete the western breakwater. He estimated the partial works would probably increase the depth over the bar to fourteen feet. Bell was appointed supervisor of the project, the completion of which was anticipated to take eighteen months.<sup>41</sup>

Parliament sanctioned the alterations to the operations of the Marine Board of Strahan with the proclamation of *The Marine Boards Amendment Act, 1898*. The Act defined the electoral districts of Strahan, Zeehan and Queenstown for the purposes of electing the two wardens from each district. On 14 November 1898 the government appointed ET Miles, MHA, EC Driffield (Mt Lyell Company), WP Hales (Engineer, Tasmanian Government Railways) and EL Hall (Commissioner of Mines) as its representatives on the new Board.<sup>42</sup> At the public elections held 15 December 1898, Messers JJ Gaffney and FO Henry of Strahan, A Morrisby, and AD Sligo from Zeehan and J Robertson and S Gaffney (Queenstown) were elected, bringing the total to ten wardens.<sup>43</sup> At the subsequent 21 December 1898 meeting of the Board, Edward Miles was elected Master Warden in a three-way contest with Morrisby and Gaffney.<sup>44</sup>

Government's sudden decision to effect the harbour works produced some concerns for the two companies battling for control of the Mount Lyell copper deposits. The North Mount Lyell Copper Company had already commenced constructing its

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<sup>40</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 August 1898.

<sup>41</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 September 1898.

<sup>42</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 15 November 1898, p. 2107.

<sup>43</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 December 1898.

<sup>44</sup> JPPP, Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, paper No. 61, p. iv.

wharf, pier and jetty at Kelly Basin, while the Mount Lyell Company had settled on Regatta Point as the site for its port operations.<sup>45</sup> The bar works had not been anticipated by the North Mount Lyell Company, which had previously commissioned the construction of a specially designed shallow draft vessel capable of clearing the existing bar. With an overall length of 310' and breadth of 40'8", the *ss North Lyell* was superior to any boat working the West Coast trade. It was capable of carrying a dead weight of about 800 tons freight and offered superior passenger comforts and accommodation. The boat was equipped with powerful engines that produced a cruising speed of fourteen knots, and it promised a quicker turnaround in trips between the West Coast and Melbourne. Sleek in appearance and innovative in all aspects, the *North Lyell* was built at the Low Walker Shipyard, Tyneside, Newcastle and was launched on 29 December 1898.<sup>46</sup>

The decision to deepen the bar also forced changes upon the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand, which had cornered the market to become the major shipping firm working the West Coast trade.<sup>47</sup> Founded in 1875, the Company had first worked the Tasmanian routes in 1878, extending its operations to the West Coast in early 1896, after purchasing the fleet of small coastal steamers owned by TA Reynolds and Co. in November that year.<sup>48</sup> The takeover of TA Reynolds and Co. had been opportunistic as the latter Company had just signed a one year contract, effective 1 September 1896, with the Mount Lyell Company. The USS Co. would now carry the goods to and from Teepookana and the Mount Lyell Company with a shipping connection to other Tasmanian ports, Melbourne and Sydney. The USS Co. also won the contract to carry passengers between Strahan and Teepookana, which saw it bring the steam launch *Pioneer* from New Zealand to ply the shallow waters of the King River.<sup>49</sup> The Company had been initially attracted to the West Coast by the promise of the substantial growth in the mining industry. It possessed larger vessels with greater cargo capacities than its predecessor, and was well placed to cater for the Mount Lyell

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<sup>45</sup> R Sticht letter to NJ Brown, MHA, 12 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 5, Non State Records (NS) 1711/313, pp. 155-157, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>46</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 14 February 1899.

<sup>47</sup> The accepted abbreviation of the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand is USS Co., which is used in this thesis.

<sup>48</sup> DG O'May, *Song of Steam: A Chronicle of Paddle Steamers and Screw Steamers in Tasmanian Waters 1832-1939*, Hobart, Government Printer, 1976, pp. 119-123. It should be noted that on page 64 of the same book O'May states the USS Co. began its association with the West Coast in 1895, which conflicts with the year (1896) advised on p. 123. It is unlikely the USS Co. could have serviced the port of Strahan prior to it purchasing the smaller coastal steamers in 1896 owned by TA Reynolds and Co.

<sup>49</sup> R Annear, *We Find A Way Or Make It, A Cultural Heritage Survey of the Lower King River Valley*, Queenstown, Forestry Commission, 1989, pp. 25-26.

Company's increasing freight needs. The firm's entry into the West Coast shipping trade was welcomed locally. The introduction of the 553 ton *Grafton* onto the service met the region's rapidly developing commercial needs.<sup>50</sup>

As demand continued to increase for shipping services to the West Coast, the USS Co. placed its 516 ton ss *Kawatiri* on the run in October 1898, this boat's cargo being limited to a load of 250 tons over the bar.<sup>51</sup> Lacking in suitable vessels equipped to carry heavier cargoes in the shallow waters encountered over the bar and inside the harbour, the USS Co. looked further afield to resolve the problem. It duly purchased the steamer *Yukon* launched in 1898 in the United Kingdom for £21,750.<sup>52</sup> This larger 1,091 ton vessel, later renamed the *Koonya*, could carry 500 tons of cargo over the bar.<sup>53</sup> Having outlaid a considerable sum to upgrade its West Coast shipping fleet, the USS Co. sought to protect its investment and limit potential competition. The Company negotiated with the North Mount Lyell Copper Company to buy the *North Lyell*, which possessed superior capacity and speed to that of its own vessels. Agreement on the sale price and the provision of future shipping services was completed by the two companies on 8 June 1899, prior to the *North Lyell* completing its maiden voyage to Kelly Basin.<sup>54</sup> The transaction presented the USS Co. with a virtual monopoly in the cartage of all Mount Lyell related produce and provided the North Mount Lyell Copper Company with a 'a profit of a few thousand pounds'.<sup>55</sup>

None of the three early boats the USS Co. placed on the West Coast run fared well over time. Sailing under the USS Company's flag, the *North Lyell* made only one trip to Kelly Basin, arriving 26 June 1899 with £20,000 worth of railway locomotives, rolling stock and smelting equipment.<sup>56</sup> Blainey contends that the boat was removed from the West Coast trade as the bar works had rendered the use of shallow-drafted vessel superfluous.<sup>57</sup> That the *North Lyell* was able to carry far superior loads over the bar than those conveyed by the other USS Co.'s boats casts doubts on Blainey's assumption. The prevailing opinion at the time was the *North Lyell's* long and narrow shape made it difficult to control in the rough and windy conditions experienced when

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<sup>50</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 January 1897.

<sup>51</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 19 October 1898.

<sup>52</sup> Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>53</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1899.

<sup>54</sup> The North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited: Report and Statement of Accounts for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1898, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>55</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 12 September 1899.

<sup>56</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 June 1899.

<sup>57</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 122.

crossing the bar.<sup>58</sup> After its maiden voyage, the *North Lyell* was renamed the *Moura*. It did not grace the shores of Macquarie Harbour a second time.<sup>59</sup> The *Kawatiri* served the West Coast with distinction before it sank on 13 August 1907 after hitting the breakwater at the entrance to Macquarie Harbour. The *Koonya* battled the difficult West Coast conditions a good deal longer than the *Kawatiri* before sinking off Sandy Cape, north of the Pieman River, on 3 June 1919.<sup>60</sup>

### **ET Miles and the Tendering Process**

This section outlines the construction of Napier Bell's innovative breakwater and inner training wall that proved an immediate success. Deepening the channel over the bar improved passenger safety and increased the loads carried by vessels. It also examines the fall from grace of influential West Coast politician and businessman, Edward Miles, who had attempted to manipulate the tender process from his position of power through the fabrication of telegraphs on an unsuspecting Strahan Marine Board.

The fight to obtain funding for the bar works proved to be a highly publicised and drawn out affair. Under normal circumstances the Braddon Government could have expected the matter to be resolved upon its approval of the £60,000 to build the western breakwater. The only area for discontent was the decision partially to adopt Bell's scheme, although there was still a strong expectation that the rest of the scheme would be eventually completed. On Bell's recommendation, the Strahan Marine Board appointed New Zealand construction expert John Barrowman to oversee the construction works.<sup>61</sup> The subsequent calling of tenders elicited strong interest. Twelve expressions were received by the close of tenders on 17 April 1899. Quotes ranged from £33,731 to £64,990. Guided by Master Warden Miles, it was resolved that the eight highest tenders be excluded and their deposits be returned. The four remaining tenders comprised Hungerford and Sons of NSW (£33,731), B Stocks and Co. from Sydney (£39,790), S Derbidge of New Zealand (£43,963) and Langtree from Sydney (£45,382). B Stocks and Co. subsequently withdrew its tender and the three remaining tenders were submitted to Napier Bell for his recommendation.<sup>62</sup>

After considering the three remaining tenders, Bell recommended on 20 April that the contract be offered to Hungerford and Sons. On preparing the contract, an interpretation clause was inserted by the Board's solicitors that required the average

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<sup>58</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 3 July 1899.

<sup>59</sup> Ware, *Strahan, Macquarie Harbour*, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, pp. 161-172 and 195-204.

<sup>61</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 11 April 1899.

weight of the first class stones to be used in the base of the breakwater to be fifteen tons, and not simply between ten and twenty tons as stipulated in the tender. Thomas Hungerford, the principal of Hungerford and Sons, declined to sign the contract as the amendment considerably increased the cost of the works. With talks deadlocked, Miles, as Master Warden, who was also the Minister of Lands and Works, having been appointed to the position on 10 May, wrote to his fellow wardens on 25 May seeking acceptance of the Derbidge tender. In his letter, Miles informed the wardens that his son, Leslie, had a small interest in the firm Derbidge and Company.<sup>63</sup> Not surprisingly the Board ignored Miles' letter and it continued to deal with Hungerford in the hope of resolving the issues. Seeking a resolution, the Board finally agreed to start the tender process anew, accepting Miles' assertions that only those who had tendered in the first round could again tender.<sup>64</sup>

In the ten years that Miles had been directly involved in West Coast matters he had played an integral role in advancing the region's transport systems. Born in Hobart on 24 June 1849, he went to sea at the age of fourteen. He gained his master's certificate in 1873 and returned to Hobart six years later, where he established a business buying, selling and chartering small coastal vessels. In 1889 he joined forces with his father-in-law, Thomas Reynolds, to form TA Reynolds and Co. This same year TA Reynolds and Co. won the tender to construct the Strahan to Zeehan railway, which enabled the Company gainfully to employ its fleet carrying railway construction materials and rolling stock on the Hobart to Strahan trade.<sup>65</sup> The steady increase in freight saw the Company add to its West Coast fleet, which by 1896 included the *Bellinger*, *Banks Peninsula*, *Pioneer*, *Bowra*, *Advance*, *Glenelg* and *Sophia Ann*, all of which regularly visited Strahan.<sup>66</sup>

After the 1896 sale of TA Reynolds and Co. to the USS Company, the new owners employed Miles as an adviser on West Coast shipping matters. One of his sons, AT Miles, also worked in the USS Co.'s Strahan office before becoming an assistant purser aboard the Company's vessel *Mokoia*.<sup>67</sup> Miles' December 1898 candidature for the position of Master Warden of the Marine Board of Strahan had been well received.

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<sup>62</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 April 1899.

<sup>63</sup> JPPP, Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, paper 61, pp. vi-vii.

<sup>64</sup> S Bennett, 'Political Corruption, The Fall of the Braddon Government and Hare-Clark Voting: ET Miles, 1899-1900,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings (THRA)*, v. 39, no. 4, December 1992, p.150.

<sup>65</sup> S Bennett, 'Edward Thomas Miles (1849-1944)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, v. 10, pp. 500-501.

<sup>66</sup> O'May, *Song of Steam*, pp. 60-64.

The public remembered Miles' contribution in Parliament to help secure the necessary funding for the bar works, his lengthy experience in West Coast shipping matters and his close connection with the USS Co., all of which held him in good stead for the job.<sup>68</sup> At the time of his election as Master Warden there had been no hint of any impropriety. Miles was considered to be brimful of energy, and a worker to his fingertips.<sup>69</sup> He had prospered by his hard work and acquired many properties in and around Strahan, making him the largest landholder in the district.<sup>70</sup> He had also invested in the building of a three-storey brick hotel near the Queenstown railway station.<sup>71</sup>

Following the death of Alfred Pillinger on 6 May 1899, Miles was elevated to the position of Minister for Lands and Works. He wasted little time in seizing the opportunity to turnaround the 'ignorant conservative selfishness under which the West Coast has hitherto chafed.'<sup>72</sup> In his short term in office, and aided by the Colony's improved economic situation, Miles increased the 1898 works budget from £85,978 to £227,649 in 1899. Locally, he improved the standards of the roads and infrastructure within the West Coast towns. He initiated the construction of the short rail link between the Mount Lyell Company's Regatta Point terminus and the government's Strahan to Zeehan line, which ended at the Strahan wharf.<sup>73</sup>

Miles' early actions in the tender process had been cleverly planned and he manipulated the relative isolation of the West Coast to great advantage. With direct access to the telegraph network, Miles and his son, Leslie, fabricated cables at short notice, some of them purporting to have been sent by reputable Sydney and New Zealand business interests. The timely withdrawal of the Stocks and Co. tender had been cleverly orchestrated by both men. An unsuspecting and ill-informed Board gullibly accepted the content matter of the telegraph communications. Edward Miles had expected the ruse to work. He was 'quick and decisive in his business methods and not unprepared to bend the law to suit himself.'<sup>74</sup>

As the tender process stalled, Miles attempted to force the issue. His 25 May letter to Board members, revealing his family's "small interest", evidenced his growing frustration. It is unclear whether his fellow wardens had sensed foul play was afoot. Any distrust of Miles' motives must have been minor as the men accepted Miles'

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<sup>67</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 July 1899.

<sup>68</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 November 1898.

<sup>69</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 May 1899.

<sup>70</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 May 1899.

<sup>71</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 5 June 1897.

<sup>72</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 5 June 1899.

<sup>73</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 July 1899.

<sup>74</sup> Bennett, 'Edward Thomas Miles (1849-1944)', v. 10, pp. 500-501.

request to have only the first round tenderers eligible in the recalling of tenders. In July 1899, before the closure of the second round of tenders, strong rumours began to circulate concerning the propriety of Miles' election as Master Warden and of his questionable role in the tender process. Both matters were raised in the House of Assembly. After intense debate and political manoeuvring, a Select Committee was appointed on 23 August 1899 'to inquire into the circumstances connected with the Macquarie Harbour Bar Contract, the relations of the Strahan Marine Board in regard thereto, and all matters pertaining to the constitution and working of that Board.'<sup>75</sup>

During the course of the extensive inquiry, it was revealed that Miles' twenty-three year old son, Leslie, was behind the Derbidge and Co. tender and his nineteen-year old daughter was involved with the Stocks and Co. submission. Edward Miles had paid both deposits of £200 in support of the tenders. In his 29 September report, Chairman, Neil Lewis, advised that the Select Committee had heard evidence of actions of a very questionable and frequently dishonourable character. With extreme reluctance and regret, Lewis advised that the Committee expressed an opinion reflecting on the character of one holding a high public position, a position that demanded the utmost integrity. The Committee concluded that Miles 'was improperly and secretly interested in two of the tenders for the West Breakwater, and used unworthy means to secure the acceptance by the Board of the higher of them.'<sup>76</sup>

The Select Committee's report was read to a hushed House of Assembly on 29 September 1899. Its findings were damning and created strong resentment towards Miles. Few had predicted the outcome. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* revealed that the report's contents had 'burst upon the people of this island with a thunder-clap-like shock...there is a rightly ringing through the colony a unanimous demand that every step possible to enforce the provisions of the laws of the land and society shall be taken.'<sup>77</sup> Miles subsequently resigned from Parliament on 2 October. His actions were a catalyst for the 11 October 1899 downfall of the Braddon Government. Miles retained his political ambitions and contested the general election of 9 March 1900, winning a seat in Hobart. News of his election was greeted by an outpouring of public disgust and indignation across the land, to such an extent that Miles resigned his seat three days before Parliament was scheduled to sit. This action brought a positive response from the Launceston *Examiner*, stating 'Captain Miles has done the right thing for once in his

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<sup>75</sup> JPPP, Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, paper 61, p. iii.

<sup>76</sup> JPPP, Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, paper 61, p. viii.

life.<sup>78</sup> Three years later Miles contested the seat of Lyell, but polled poorly, although topping the ballot box in his home town Strahan.<sup>79</sup> Miles eventually left for Asia, where he sold ships on commission for the USS Company. He was later instrumental in establishing a successful tin dredging businesses in Malaya and Thailand.<sup>80</sup>

The Parliamentary review into Miles' actions temporarily stalled the breakwater tender process. The Marine Board had convened on 31 July 1899 to consider the five tenders received. Previous frontrunners, S Derbidge and Co. (£39,877) and Hungerford and Sons (£42,736), were again the two lowest tenderers. As the second tender process had drawn a considerably higher figure from Hungerfords, the Board sought an agreement with the Company based on the original specifications and at the original price. Hungerfords refused the offer. As the matter was still unresolved at the time of the Select Committee hearings, its Chairman, Neil Lewis, advised the Marine Board 'to give the gravest consideration to the facts brought out in the evidence given before us before they decide to accept any tender.'<sup>81</sup> The Board heeded Lewis's advice. Unable to broker a deal with Hungerford and Sons, and forced to ignore the Miles backed consortium of Derbidge and Co., the tender was awarded to Langtree and Co. for £43,918.<sup>82</sup>

Because the tendered amount fell short of the £60, 000 allocated, the Board decided to proceed to tender for the construction of the inner training wall. This time Edward Miles submitted a tender, his figure of £10,565 12s.6d. being well below Langtree's tender of £13,617.<sup>83</sup> The Master Warden, James Gaffney, and his Board, decided it was inappropriate to deal with Miles and awarded the works to Langtree.<sup>84</sup> The contract for the western breakwater works was eventually signed on 14 October 1899.<sup>85</sup> Construction activities commenced on 28 November 1899.<sup>86</sup> To facilitate the landing of the goods and machinery, a jetty was constructed on the western shore,

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<sup>77</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 October 1899.

<sup>78</sup> *Examiner*, 24 April 1900.

<sup>79</sup> Bennett, 'Political Corruption', pp. 153-158.

<sup>80</sup> TA Miles, 'Tin from the Sea', *THRA*, v. 19, no. 2, June 1972, p. 78.

<sup>81</sup> JPPP, Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, paper 61, p. viii.

<sup>82</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, Hobart, Department of Environment and Land Management, 1995, p. 22. Langtree and Co. was also known as NC Langtree.

<sup>83</sup> The amount of NC Langtree's tender was shown as £13,950 in the 2 December 1900 *Mount Lyell Standard* but this figure was amended to £13,617 12s.5d. following an agreement to vary the contract at a subsequent meeting of the Marine Board held on 20 January 1900, as reported in the *Herald* on 22 January 1900.

<sup>84</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 December 1899.

<sup>85</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report by Napier Bell, 1902, paper 19, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 October 1902.



immediately inside the Heads. A short railway, thirty-five chains in length, was built between the jetty and Pilot Beach, the commencement point of the breakwater. Stone was initially obtained on-site using a small crane capable of lifting two tons at a time. These rocks were unsuited for the deepwater foundations.<sup>87</sup>

A second railway line, about one and a quarter miles long, was constructed to the main quarry at Hobby's Lookout, located to the north west of the Pilot Beach worksite. Work was hampered by the non-availability of railway iron, sleepers and machinery. It took six months for the 70 pound rails and the heavy-duty railway axles and wheels for the crane to arrive from England. Four cranes were eventually employed at the quarry, their lifting capacities ranging from six to twenty tons. Carpenters were employed to build the forty sturdy wagons to carry the rock as no suitable rolling stock could be procured in Australia. Full-scale work on the breakwater, utilising the stone from the new quarry, commenced on 28 August 1900.<sup>88</sup> At the peak of the project 220 men were employed on the outer breakwater and a further 30 men on the inner training wall.<sup>89</sup>

The work was particularly hard and the weather conditions unpleasant. Much care was needed to position the quartzite rock at the tip end of the breakwater, the difficult swells, large waves and strong tidal currents contributing to the miserable experience. The isolated nature of the workers' encampment brought its own set of problems. While inspecting the breakwater works, Napier Bell noted Langtree's annoyance at the loss of productivity caused by the siting of a hotel nearby. The Ozone hotel had been approved by the Licensing Branch on the basis that it would eliminate sly grog-selling. This premise was incorrect, as Bell had witnessed the sly grog activities in full swing. With few leisure activities for the men, the hotel soon became the centre of attraction. Bell implored the Marine Board to oppose the renewal of the license and abolish the sale of drink by whatever means were possible.<sup>90</sup> The appeal to de-license the Ozone Hotel was unsuccessful. It was often by visitors to the area, including Marine Board representatives, who found it satisfied 'the wants of the inner man'.<sup>91</sup>

Apart from the initial delays, construction work on the western breakwater generally proceeded to plan and within the cost estimates. This was not the case with the 3,000 yard long inner training wall that extended eastwards from Wellington Head,

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<sup>87</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 January 1900.

<sup>88</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report of Mr John Barrowman, Inspector for the Marine Board of Strahan, together with chart showing soundings taken on the Bar on July 8, 1902, 1902, paper 50, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 18 July 1900.

<sup>90</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 December 1900.

<sup>91</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 June 1901.

past Round Head. The works contract was let on 22 January 1900 and the pile driving commenced the following month. The contract for driving the wooden piles, at 50 feet intervals, was let to the experienced wharf construction contractors, Duff Brothers of Hobart.<sup>92</sup>

Other preliminary works associated with the training wall included opening an extensive quarry at Round Head and constructing a small wharf to facilitate loading stone aboard the USS Company's barges. Unlike the breakwater, the training wall was not built as an extension out from dry land. The barges, which carried loads of 80 tons, had to be towed out to the line of the training wall, as marked by the piles, and the stone manually dumped into the water. In an innovative move to improve the unloading process, W McDonald of Strahan constructed a specially designed punt, 70 feet long and 22 feet wide, with a capacity of about 100 tons. Built in just six weeks, the punt featured rails laid upon the decking that enabled it to carry six of the locally built 16-ton capacity tip trucks at a time. The punt was towed into position and secured to the piles, and the stone was tipped from the trucks. This process saved considerable time and labor.<sup>93</sup>

Bell's costing of the breakwater works had been very accurate, but his original estimates for the training wall were astray. He had anticipated using 74,000 tons of rock in the wall, whereas the actual amount totalled 155,000 tons, accounting for £26,938 of the total cost overrun of £30,620. Bell blamed the problem on the actual depth of water being greater than indicated in the surveys and the rapid scouring of the sand as soon as the stone was thrown into the water. Before commencing the training wall, shipping had been confined to the southernmost channel that ran between the western shore and the training wall. For this reason, the section of the training wall closest to Wellington Head was left open until the last moment so as to minimise inconvenience and provide sufficient time for the currents to scour the northern channel.<sup>94</sup>

The theory worked to the extreme, much to the cost detriment of the project. The partially completed training wall scoured both the outer northern channel and the southern channel behind the wall. When it came to closing off the southern channel, the differences in the original depths and the scoured bottom varied from nineteen feet to forty-three feet. Consequently, the final section required a far greater volume of rock fill than initially anticipated. Surprisingly, the extra works on the 9,100 feet long

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<sup>92</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 April 1900.

<sup>93</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 July 1900.

training wall did not delay the completion of the project. Bell noted that time had been saved by opening a second quarry at Wellington Head. He considered the absence of an accurate method of weighing the stone also accelerated the process.<sup>95</sup>

To redress the cost shortfall, the Marine Board of Strahan applied to Parliament for additional funding of £35,000 to complete the works. Concerned by the amount requested, a Parliamentary fact finding party was dispatched to inspect and report on the site operations. The 5 October 1901 visit to Macquarie Heads provided a valuable insight into the grand scale of the isolated project. The onlookers observed the partly constructed western breakwater had significantly improved the depth over the bar, to the considerable satisfaction of the wardens and to the relief of the parliamentarians. Obtaining funding this time proved far easier. The success of Napier Bell's innovative scheme was apparent. Edward Mulcahy, a long time supporter and the Minister for Lands and Works, confidently advised that Parliament was fully prepared 'to do justice to this important part of the Island.'<sup>96</sup> At a banquet held in Strahan Edward Mulcahy announced that the government was fully seized with the importance of the bar works and, if necessary, it would provide funding of a quarter of a million pounds for the works.<sup>97</sup> The Hobart *Mercury* provided a less positive account of events, advising that the members inspecting the works were in favour of completing the western breakwater but construction of the eastern breakwater was out of the question.<sup>98</sup> Parliament eventually sanctioned a loan to the Marine Board for a further £35,000 to complete the works.<sup>99</sup>

Work on the training wall was completed by 7 December 1901. It was anticipated that occasional repairs would be required where slips occurred because of the ongoing scouring process. The success of the wall was apparent. The newly-scoured northern channel was now capable of handling steamers 'carrying 800 tons of cargo without any trouble, that two years ago could not have passed through empty.'<sup>100</sup> While the training wall had been completed ahead of schedule, Langtree had lagged behind with the work on the western breakwater. In February 1902 the Marine Board granted him an extension of eight months to complete the works, in recognition of the earlier delays which had been outside his control. The following month the Board sought to pre-empt

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<sup>94</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report by Napier Bell, 1902, paper 19, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report by Napier Bell, 1902, paper 19, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 7 October 1901.

<sup>97</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 October 1901.

<sup>98</sup> *Mercury*, 7 October 1901.

<sup>99</sup> JPPP, Finance, 1902, paper 6, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report of Mr John Barrowman, Inspector for the Marine Board of Strahan, together with chart showing soundings taken on the Bar on July 8, 1902, 1902, paper 50, p. 1.

any future claim for compensation and offered to takeover the incomplete works. A deal was eventually brokered between Langtree's valuer, Mr RG Watkins, and Mr TH Goods, acting on behalf of the Marine Board,<sup>101</sup> It enabled the Board to assume control of the contract on 15 March 1902 and complete the works by day-labour. John Barrowman, reporting on the outer breakwater, advised that its effect had been noticeable from the very beginning of the works and 'it is reasonable to expect that ships drawing 14 feet of water will in future be able at all times, barring big storms, to work the bar.'<sup>102</sup>

Construction of the 3,800 feet long breakwater was eventually completed on 20 September 1902, Napier Bell reporting the total cost to be £62,300. A total of 243,000 tons of stone had been used, which proved exceptionally close to the 244,000 tons originally estimated by Bell. The breakwater had effectively increased the depth on the bar from eight feet six inches at low water or spring tides to sixteen feet.<sup>103</sup> Keeping a close eye on the events was the Mount Lyell Company's General Manager, Robert Sticht, who enthusiastically reported to his Board that the *Kamona* had entered the Strahan Harbour on 19 August 1902 with 811 tons of cargo, the heaviest load yet recorded.<sup>104</sup>

### **Funding Issues and Ongoing Harbour Improvements**

The issue of building the eastern breakwater festered for years. The following section covers the role of the cash-strapped Marine Board as it sought to improve the harbour and repay its substantial debt. Although the initial works had produced encouraging results, Bell was still keen to see the remaining works proceed. He considered that a permanent solution to the deposition of sand on the bar could not be guaranteed without the completion of the scheme. Bell argued that by constructing the eastern breakwater a channel twenty-five feet deep would be achieved. Once completed, the sand could not re-enter the harbour because the breakwaters would deflect it towards the shoreline. He further reviewed his original plans and submitted a simplified proposal that avoided the need for a bridge over the channel. He planned to utilise punts to carry the loaded tip trucks from the western shore quarry, in much the

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<sup>101</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 20 March 1902.

<sup>102</sup> JPPP, Macquarie Harbour Works: Report of Mr John Barrowman, Inspector for the Marine Board of Strahan, together with chart showing soundings taken on the Bar on July 8, 1902, 1902, paper 50, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 October 1902.

<sup>104</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 4 September 1902, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 10, NS 1711/318, p. 106, AOT.

same manner as the inner training wall had been built.<sup>105</sup> Lending its support behind the push to build the eastern breakwater, the *Mount Lyell Standard* believed the work could not 'be questioned by those who have any proper conception of the mineral potentialities of the Coast.'<sup>106</sup>

Bell's plan to build the eastern wall did not receive the immediate support of the Marine Board of Strahan, which was struggling to meet its loan repayments to government. The blame for the Board's poor financial status was attributed to a drop in revenue caused by a temporary depression in the mineral market and several poor Board decisions. The primary effect of Bell's works had been to concentrate the flow of currents around the immediate approaches from outside and within the entry to the harbour. A problem still existed with the sandy shoals located inside the harbour, which the Board had sought to fix by spending £5,000 previously allocated by the government to dredge the entry into the harbour.<sup>107</sup> The Board had considered procuring the dredge *Agnew* from the Mersey Marine Board for the task,<sup>108</sup> but changed its mind and accepted a proposal advanced by engineer W Jennings to build its own dredge. The wooden-hulled *Macquarie* was built locally and launched at East Strahan on 26 March 1902. The Oregon pine and hardwood vessel was eighty-seven feet long, twenty-five feet wide and six feet deep.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, it was fitted out with poorly designed equipment. Trials of the *Macquarie* commenced in July 1902 but proved unsuccessful, costing the Board £4,601. Bell condemned the attempt as a waste of effort and money.<sup>110</sup>

The Board was heavily criticised for its misuse of public money and for not discussing the plan with Napier Bell. Bell had considered displacing the sand both by dredging and by dragging a plough rake over it, as far back as in 1890, but dismissed these ideas as being too expensive and useless for any permanent effect.<sup>111</sup> The *Herald* lamented that, until qualified men managed the affairs of the port, there would be little likelihood of Parliament voting any more money to complete the harbour works. It

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<sup>105</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 October 1902.

<sup>106</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 September 1902.

<sup>107</sup> The Austral Archaeology report, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, page 27, states 'in August 1901 the Government agreed to place a sum of £5,000 in the hands of the Marine Board for the purpose of dredging and improving Macquarie Harbour.' Reference is made in the 10 July 1900 *Herald* of a grant for £5,000 for dredging. It is likely the £5,000 is the amount set aside by Government in the JPPP, Public Works Proposals, 1898-9, 1898, paper 46, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 June 1901.

<sup>109</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 March 1902.

<sup>110</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, p. 27.

<sup>111</sup> JPPP, Entrance to Macquarie Harbour: Report by C Napier Bell, 1890, paper 61, p. 3.

added that the Marine Board 'by its want of business tact and lack of management, has brought this about.'<sup>112</sup>

The bright and prosperous future once predicted for the port of Strahan had not eventuated. Much blame for the failure was levelled at the Marine Board. In July 1903 the disgraced former Master Warden, Edward Miles, urged the community not to seek recrimination against the Board but to look to the future with a united front and endeavour to restore order out of the chaos. Miles identified four causes that had contributed to the failure of the Board. Potential revenue had been lost through Sticht's success in developing pyritic smelting at Mount Lyell, substantially reducing fuel imports. The unforeseen downfall of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company also diminished shipping activity, as had the diversion of traffic away from Strahan, in favour of Burnie. Miles considered the incapacity and friction within the administration had cost the Board dearly. He saw a time when the Board could function in a better light, but only after the Federal Government's acquisition of the navigation and lighthouse responsibilities and the reduction of Board numbers to three or five members.<sup>113</sup>

Miles' assessment of the situation was correct to a significant degree. Sticht's successful development of the pyritic smelting process on 13 November 1902 reduced the Mount Lyell Company's annual consumption of imported coal from 15,300 to 6,300 tons.<sup>114</sup> The 22 May 1903 amalgamation of the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Copper Companies had reduced the duplication of facilities and ship movements about the harbour, considerably affecting the Board's revenue. Miles' assertion that the advent of the Emu Bay railway had led to reduced trade through the harbour was correct. Soon after the railway's opening through to Zeehan on 30 December 1900, the Mount Lyell Company had commenced railing its coke and coal from Burnie through to Queenstown. Not only had the Emu Bay Railway captured most of the coke and coal transport on offer, it had also drawn much of the mineral produce from the Zeehan, Dundas and North Dundas districts, that had been previously railed to Strahan. The port of Burnie offered considerable advantages over Strahan. It catered for larger ships that sailed direct to foreign ports. The reduction of freight passing through Strahan reflected the growing impact of the operations of the Emu Bay Railway. Imports and exports through Strahan peaked in 1901 at £1,201,223, dropping to £996,094 in 1902, and in

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<sup>112</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 September 1902.

<sup>113</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 July 1903.

<sup>114</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 152.

1903 to £871,552. Burnie port's figures over the corresponding years had grown from £156,891 in 1901 to £317,206 in 1903.<sup>115</sup>

Miles' claims of incapacity and friction in the administration were understandable. The Marine Board Warden and MLC, Arthur Morrisby, and his fellow cohorts had levelled the allegations of bribery against him during the 1899 Select Committee inquiry. In an effort to address its budget problems, the Board dispensed with dredging operations, retrenched staff and endeavoured to obtain Parliamentary approval for the repayment of the interest only on its loan.<sup>116</sup> Miles implored the Board not to consider imposing a levy on all outward wharfage as a method of recouping funds. He considered that any such toll would be borne by the Mount Lyell and Tasmanian Smelters, which were keeping the West Coast alive, with the possibility of "killing the goose that lays the golden egg."<sup>117</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company had fared well at the expense of the port of Strahan. The Company manipulated the situation, using its access to the ports of Burnie and Strahan to its advantage. The Marine Board of Strahan, the Emu Bay Railway Company and the USS Co. were obliged to offer competitive terms and conditions to the Company to retain its patronage. The Marine Board of Strahan's plight was severe. Without a substantial boost in trade, the Board was doomed to a creeping paralysis as it struggled to pay off the principal and interest on the loan owed to the government. As the years passed, its financial situation failed to improve. In 1905 the Board sought to raise funds to pay for the much needed dredging of the shipping channels within the harbour. At a well attended meeting, held in Strahan on 7 July 1905, it was argued that the West Coast community and the Marine Board were being penalised by government. Interest at the rate of 3 per cent was charged on the harbour loan, whereas Burnie enjoyed an interest free loan. Worse still, the Board had leased the *Agnew* from the Mersey Board and paid "through the nose for it", despite the dredge belonging to the State. Once again, the government was blamed for approving the extension of the Emu Bay Railway into Zeehan and the subsequent diversion of traffic away from Strahan. The meeting sought justice and the placing of the port of Strahan on an equal basis to the port of Burnie.<sup>118</sup>

Mr Holyman, of the shipping firm William Holyman & Sons, raised fears for the future of services into Macquarie Harbour. He warned that the existing high wharfage

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<sup>115</sup> *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac*, Imports, Exports, and Duty Collected, 1903 (p. 271), 1904 (p. 271) and 1905 (p. 271).

<sup>116</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 September 1902.

<sup>117</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 July 1903.

charges could see an end to the West Coast trade. Holyman considered it imperative to reduce the cost of shipping. This could be achieved by dredging the channels to open the harbour to larger vessels.<sup>119</sup> Without a regular dredging regime, the money previously spent on the bar works were wasted. The effects of a temporary dredging program using the *Agnew* were noticeable. After just a few weeks work, the depth of the inner channel had increased from ten feet six inches to fourteen feet at Wellington Head.<sup>120</sup>

The inability to completely resolve the harbour issues frustrated everyone. Southern interests considered that all the works had been a waste of public money. The *Herald* agreed with the sentiment, but it placed the blame squarely on the politicians who had refused to provide funds for the completion of the scheme. The paper contended that Bell's partially completed harbour improvements had produced the desired effects, and vessels carrying nine hundred tons of freight could now negotiate the bar and enter the harbour. However, the depths achieved by the scouring action created by the inner training wall and the western breakwater were still insufficient to permit the entry of the larger overseas vessels. Only with the completion of Bell's eastern breakwater could the problem be resolved. The *Herald* noted the Marine Board had met all its loan repayments for the works, including interest. This fact that had been conveniently overlooked by a parochial government that had continued to prop up a number of highly inefficient branchline railways elsewhere in the State.<sup>121</sup>

Coming into 1907, the financial prospects of the Marine Board of Strahan had improved slightly, the reason being an upsurge in the market prices for minerals.<sup>122</sup> Causing concern to the Board was the increased frequency of the boats now scraping the sandy bottom of the channels inside the harbour. Remedial action was sought as a matter of urgency to ensure the shipping lanes remained open to medium sized vessels. With an eye to the improved economic outlook for the region, the Board decided in April 1907 to purchase the interstate dredge *Timaru* to rectify the problem. The sale fell through when the government refused to support the Board's application for a loan.<sup>123</sup>

After nearly a decade free from shipwrecks, disaster struck again at Macquarie Heads. On 13 August 1907 the USS Company's steamer *Kawatiri* hit the western breakwater. The high seas, combined with a strong ebb tide flowing out of the harbour,

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<sup>118</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 July 1905.

<sup>119</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 August 1905.

<sup>120</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 December 1905.

<sup>121</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 September 1906.

<sup>122</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for Year Ending December 31, 1906, 1907, paper 7.

<sup>123</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 April 1907.



had made sailing conditions extremely difficult. The ship quickly foundered, with six lives lost and a further two drowning five days later when attempting to salvage the ship's papers and instruments. The subsequent inquiry absolved the ship's master and officers, but raised issues concerning the placement of the light signals and the manner in which they were displayed.<sup>124</sup> At the time of the *Kawatiri*'s sinking, the USS Co. had enjoyed a monopoly of shipping services into Macquarie Harbour. However, without competition, the firm's standard of service had dropped. This despotic attitude angered the general travelling public, the merchants and the Mount Lyell Company. The West Coast community maintained its pressure on government to improve the harbour and open up competition to shipping firms with larger vessels. Robert Sticht considered the USS Co. was deliberately running things very badly as a ploy to induce the government to improve access to the harbour. Sticht wanted the works to be done, in the hope that they would induce competition and reduce shipping rates.<sup>125</sup>

Frederick O'Henry, a Warden of the Marine Board and a major importer and shop owner on the West Coast, was scathing in his criticism of the USS Co., describing its service as disgraceful and shameful. He considered the Company to be 'an all-powerful combine, with far reaching influences and interests, against whom it is next to useless to protest...the inconvenience is often felt, not so much by the storekeeper as by the consumer. And the effect is to paralyse trade.'<sup>126</sup> The Gormanston Town Board was incensed at the poor service provided by the USS Company. It circulated a petition within the community requesting the firm to 'consider the advisability of placing upon the trade steamers such as will serve the requirements of the West Coast, and thus prevent unrest to the people and diversion of trade from this port [Strahan].'<sup>127</sup> The mining communities around Mount Lyell suffered considerably. Transporting merchandise from Burnie, over three rail systems, was not a viable alternative. At a public meeting held in Queenstown, its residents and business community alike sought an assurance from the USS Co. that shipping services would be improved. The meeting also endorsed the Strahan Marine Board's action in applying for a government loan of £10,000 to finance the purchase of a dredge.<sup>128</sup>

The responses to the Queenstown meeting were almost instantaneous. The USS Co. replaced the smaller steamer *Rimu* with the larger 684 ton *Wainui* on the West

<sup>124</sup> Broxam, *Shipwrecks of Tasmania's Wild West Coast*, pp. 161-172.

<sup>125</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 17 September 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/323, pp. 244-245, AOT.

<sup>126</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 September 1907.

<sup>127</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 September 1907.

<sup>128</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 October 1907.

Coast run on 17 October 1907,<sup>129</sup> and the Cabinet sanctioned the loan for the purchase of an up-to-date dredge.<sup>130</sup> The state-of-the-art vessel was to be built by Messrs Simmons and Company of Renfrew, Scotland. Of superior construction, using the best quality steel, the dredge was equipped with the highest-class engines. The vessel cost £13,600, not including a further £400 spent on spare gear.<sup>131</sup> Named the *Macquarie*, the dredge was eventually placed in service in early March 1909. It achieved immediate results, increasing the depth of the channel to fourteen feet at low water.<sup>132</sup> The *Macquarie* remained in frequent use, removing large quantities of sand and silt from the main channel and occasionally from the mouth of the Gordon River. A 1911 report provided to the Marine Board by William Reid Bell noted the efficient work done by the *Macquarie*, but observed that it was still inadequate to cope with the forces of nature at work in Macquarie Harbour. Bell concluded the currents carrying the lodes of sand could only be effectively controlled by training walls, breakwaters and by fixing the moving sandhills. The *Macquarie* should then be used to supplement these works.<sup>133</sup>

The *Macquarie's* success enabled the USS Co. to increase the size of its ships visiting the harbour. Commonly referred to as "K" Class boats, the vessels had a freight capacity of 1,000 tons, which improved the efficiencies for all concerned.<sup>134</sup> Despite the dredging improvements to the main channel, the port continued to suffer aggressive competition from Burnie, which boasted superior facilities. A push recommenced to implement Napier Bell's harbour works in their entirety. Finding it difficult to stir up the public's interest in the matter, the *Herald* lamented 'the push that won against long odds is no longer here, and citizens, while lamenting dull times, make no corporate effort with a view to improving them. The industrial era has bought us activity of muscle, but a decided diminution in the exercise of progressive ideas and actions.'<sup>135</sup> In October 1913 the Tasmanian Smelting Company's works at Zeehan closed, further decreasing activity through the port of Strahan. The outbreak of World War 1 the following year led to the collapse of the heavy metal market. Strahan did not suffer alone. The fortunes of Zeehan, once known as "Silver City," were also sinking quickly.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>129</sup> O'May, *Song of Steam*, pp.136-139.

<sup>130</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 January 1908.

<sup>131</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 November 1908.

<sup>132</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 May 1909.

<sup>133</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, p. 28.

<sup>134</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 6 September 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, p. 502, AOT.

<sup>135</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 November 1911.

<sup>136</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 248-249.

As the mineral exports from the mining districts to the north of Strahan dried up, the remaining shipping activities in Macquarie Harbour were confined to the copper mining operations at Mount Lyell. The little traffic generated by the Zeehan area was actively sought by the Burnie Marine Board, which promoted itself as an “overseas port” and the ‘natural outlet for the West Coast ores.’<sup>137</sup> For a brief period it was suggested that a woollen mill should be built near Macquarie Harbour as cheap hydro-electricity could power the enterprise. It was argued that such a development would support harbour improvements.<sup>138</sup>

Both the Strahan and Burnie port authorities closely observed the developments of the Mount Read zinc and lead deposits, each hoping to capture the traffic from the district. The Mt Read and Rosebery Mines Ltd was formed in June 1916. Of a total 345,000 shares, the Mount Lyell Company held 100,000. The merger of the leading mines in the Rosebery and Williamsford districts was hailed as ‘one of the most important events in the history of Tasmanian mining.’<sup>139</sup> The Marine Board of Strahan had anticipated the new Company would use the old Tasmanian Smelting Company’s facilities at Zeehan to process its ores. Consequently, the venture was more likely to freight its minerals over the twenty-eight and a half mile railway to Strahan in preference to the alternative ninety and a half mile line to Burnie. The Board anticipated that, if it won the freight, Napier Bell’s scheme would be completed in its entirety, enabling vessels of 2,000 to 3,000 tons to enter the harbour. It would also reinforce Strahan’s position as the natural port for the West Coast mineral trade.<sup>140</sup>

The full development of the Rosebery ores did not eventuate until after the Great Depression, although a grinding and flotation plant was erected at the Zeehan smelters. Commencing on 9 February 1924, small quantities of zinc concentrate (calcines) were railed to the Mount Lyell Company’s wharf at Regatta Point, and shipped to the Electrolytic Zinc Company’s works at Risdon.<sup>141</sup> The main treatment plant for the Rosebery ores was eventually located at Rosebery, the mill commencing operations 19 February 1936. The lead concentrates were railed from Rosebery to Burnie, while small amounts of zinc continued to be roasted at Zeehan and the calcines railed to Strahan for shipping.<sup>142</sup> Without the entire Rosebery output, the Marine Board could not justify the

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<sup>137</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 July 1916.

<sup>138</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1915-16, paper 23, p. 17.

<sup>139</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 252.

<sup>140</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 July 1916.

<sup>141</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 17 September 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, pp. 517-518, AOT.

<sup>142</sup> L Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 1997, pp. 192-193.

completion of Bell's scheme. The drawn out process led to another mooted interim measure to improve harbour shipping. The proposal comprised the construction of a second inner training wall, extending from Wellington Head, via Cap Island, to Bonnet Island. It was anticipated the increased scouring action of the water would deepen the main channel and, if successful, eliminate the need for extensive dredging. The government approved a £5,000 loan to the Marine Board of Strahan. Work on the 1,324 feet stone wall were commenced in 1921.<sup>143</sup>

The following year a further loan for £2,800 was sought and approved to finish the training wall works that had run over budget.<sup>144</sup> The additional funding proved insufficient to complete the wall, which was still short of Cap Island. Russell Murray, the new General Manager of the Mount Lyell Company, considered that the work had been carried out without any expert supervision and it looked far from complete.<sup>145</sup> The plan to extend the training wall further north, from Cap Island to Bonnet Island, estimated to cost a further £2,700, apparently failed to win government approval.<sup>146</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company came to the aid of the financially strapped Board, advancing an interest free loan to enable it to proceed with dredging operations during the construction of the training wall.<sup>147</sup> The Company lobbied the government to ensure an additional sum of £2,800 was secured to complete the training wall.<sup>148</sup> At the time Murray lacked confidence in the ability of the Marine Board. He advised Head Office that the Board was a very feeble and in-adequate institution that comprised the publican at Regatta Point, a market gardener at Macquarie Heads, and the Harbour Master, who was the Master Warden and held the position of Pilot. The long-serving Secretary, Mr A Prater, failed to impress Murray, who described him as being 'elderly and fossilized, but draws a remarkable salary of £10 per week.'<sup>149</sup> Murray, unsuccessfully canvassed the State Treasurer, Sir Walter Lee, to have the Marine Board replaced by a Harbour Trust.<sup>150</sup> Fortunately, the small training wall achieved the desired scouring effect on the channel, saving the Board considerably through the reduction in dredging works.

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<sup>143</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1920-21, 1921, paper 45, p. 5.

<sup>144</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1921-22, 1922, paper 37, p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> R Murray to Company Solicitors, Butler McIntyre & Butler, 20 August 1923, Staff Letters, NS 1711/557, pp. 203-204, AOT.

<sup>146</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, p. 32.

<sup>147</sup> R Murray letter to Master Warden, 2 August 1922, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/680, pp. 159-160, AOT.

<sup>148</sup> R Murray letter to Master Warden, 26 August 1922, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/680, p. 170, AOT.

<sup>149</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 22 September 1922, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/343, pp. 43-44, AOT.

<sup>150</sup> R Murray to Company Solicitors, Butler McIntyre & Butler, 20 August 1923, Staff Letters, NS 1711/557, pp. 203-204, AOT.

Eventually, the Board was able to dispense with the services of the *Macquarie*, selling it in 1934 to the Leven Harbour Trust.<sup>151</sup>

### **The Ports of Macquarie Harbour**

The port of Strahan initially developed as a thriving regional outlet for the mines and towns scattered about the central West Coast area. As the Mount Lyell Company prospered and established its own operations at Regatta Point, the reliance on Strahan diminished considerably. This section examines how the Mount Lyell Company manipulated the use of the various ports about Macquarie Harbour, in conjunction with the railways, to advance its own ends and dominate the Macquarie Harbour transport systems. A brief history of each of the settlements is also discussed as each played an important role in the advancement of the region.

The early berthing facilities at Long Bay were very congested around November 1889, with the commencement of construction works on the Strahan to Zeehan railway. The contractors, Reynolds and Co., had built a new jetty (170' x 42'), with a subsequent extension (120' x 32') to facilitate the growing trade.<sup>152</sup> In August 1891 a sum of £10,000 was provided from within the government's railway budget to again extend the structure a further 200 feet and to run the railway onto the wharf.<sup>153</sup> In October 1891 the Strahan Town Board had called tenders to backfill the land between the foreshore and the railway wharf, to provide valuable space for storage and railway activities. The action promised to eliminate the health risk emanating from the stagnant water that collected in the area. The reclamation was completed in March 1892, and required over 10,000 cubic yards of fill.<sup>154</sup>

The future for the port appeared momentarily bright. It was envisaged that future developments by the Mount Lyell Company would see activity expand. Adding to the expectations were plans to build a smelting plant in Strahan to treat the Zeehan ores.<sup>155</sup> The port of Strahan prospered from the construction of the Mount Lyell Company's Abt railway, which commenced in December 1894, as goods were transshipped to and from the Company's temporary terminus at Teepookana, upstream on the King River. Over the five years that Teepookana served as a temporary port, all incoming and outgoing cargo passed through Strahan. A flotilla of shallow draft steamers, barges and motor

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<sup>151</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, p. 33.

<sup>152</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 July 1891.

<sup>153</sup> JPPP, Public Works: Report of Engineer-In-Chief (Including Report of Government Architect), 1891, paper 118, p. iv.

<sup>154</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 March 1892.

<sup>155</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 June 1894.

launches plied the waterway between the two centres, the volume of trade assuming large proportions.<sup>156</sup>

The flurry of small craft and trade over the wharves at Strahan ceased abruptly with 1 November 1899 opening of the railway extension from Teepookana through to the Company's new wharf facilities at Regatta Point. In the period between the extension of the railway line between the two ports, which opened to traffic on 16 October 1900, local cargo was transferred in lighters between the two wharves. Passengers were carried across the bay in Grining Brothers oil fired launch, *Eagle*, at a fare of 6d. each way.<sup>157</sup>

Expecting Napier Bell's works at Macquarie Heads to begin in the latter half of 1899, the Tasmanian Government Railways (TGR) embarked on an ambitious works program at Strahan. Seeking to relieve the congested wharf facilities and to provide improved amenities to cater for the increase in trade that would follow the completion of Bell's works, large wharf extensions and massive reclamation works were implemented. Contractors, Ward Brothers, began work on the railway wharf on 10 July 1899.<sup>158</sup> The new deepwater structure was 750 feet long and 34 feet wide and was located some 550 feet along from the existing wharf, which was small in comparison, being 490 feet in length. The distance between the two wharves was sheet piled and filled with 61,000 cubic yards of earth, while a further 10,000 cubic yards of rock was used to reclaim a 290 feet section adjacent to the new extension. Most of the building materials were obtained from within the region, the earth fill from the hill directly behind the works, the rock from the Ten Mile ballast pit on the Strahan to Zeehan railway. The peppermint gum piles and decking came from the Eden and Henty areas along the same line. On completion, the wharf area boasted some two and a half miles of railway sidings. The works were intended to 'bring the port prominently under the notice of ship-owners and masters from [sic] the conveniences provided for the smart dispatch of vessels trading to the West Coast.'<sup>159</sup>

Some 200 men were employed on the work, which had been all-but completed by December 1900. The new wharf enabled multiple steamers to quickly load and unload freight directly into the railway wagons, saving costs and improving efficiencies. Five acres of land was reclaimed, greatly assisting the functionality of the port and providing a vastly improved appearance to the town. By the end of the year the only works

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<sup>156</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 March 1897.

<sup>157</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 November 1899.

<sup>158</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 July 1899.

<sup>159</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 August 1900.

requiring completion were the goods shed (180' by 40'), and the fitting out of the wharf 'with all the latest requirements and conveniences for the berthing, loading and unloading of vessels.'<sup>160</sup> A number of important infrastructure facilities were built close to the new wharf. These included the Miller Brothers' cool storage plant, completed in September 1899,<sup>161</sup> the Customs offices which had opened on 10 September 1900,<sup>162</sup> and the Union Steamship Company's three story Italian Renaissance style offices that opened on 30 May 1901.<sup>163</sup>

The combination of the opening of the Regatta Point wharf and the 21 December 1900 completion of the Emu Bay Company's railway line into Zeehan substantially reduced the volume of freight passing over the Strahan wharves. The port could not compete with Burnie as it catered for the larger overseas steamers.<sup>164</sup> Frederick Back, TGR General Manager, noted that within four months of the opening of the Emu Bay railway, revenue on the government's Strahan to Zeehan railway had dropped considerably. Back had fought against the Emu Bay connection to Zeehan and had warned the government on several occasions of the likely outcome.<sup>165</sup> To a lesser extent, the TGR shared the blame for the downturn in trade. Its high tariffs and substandard carriages had received much public protest and criticism over the years. The local Legislative Council member, Arthur Morrisby, severely criticised the Railway Department for crippling the port of Strahan. He described the £30,000 to £40,000 spent on the wharf extension as an "act of folly."<sup>166</sup>

The government's transport strategies on the West Coast drew criticisms for inconsistencies and ineptitude. It was claimed the region had been unfairly burdened in having to repay the loan plus interest on the harbour works whereas the breakwater at Burnie was paid from public money. By charging high freight tariffs and then handing out concessions to a private company to build a line to Zeehan, the government had doomed both its railway and the port of Strahan to heavy losses. The Queenstown, Gormanston and Strahan communities depended on the port for importing basic commodities. The population was subjected to the unfair burden of repaying the

<sup>160</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 December 1900.

<sup>161</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 September 1899.

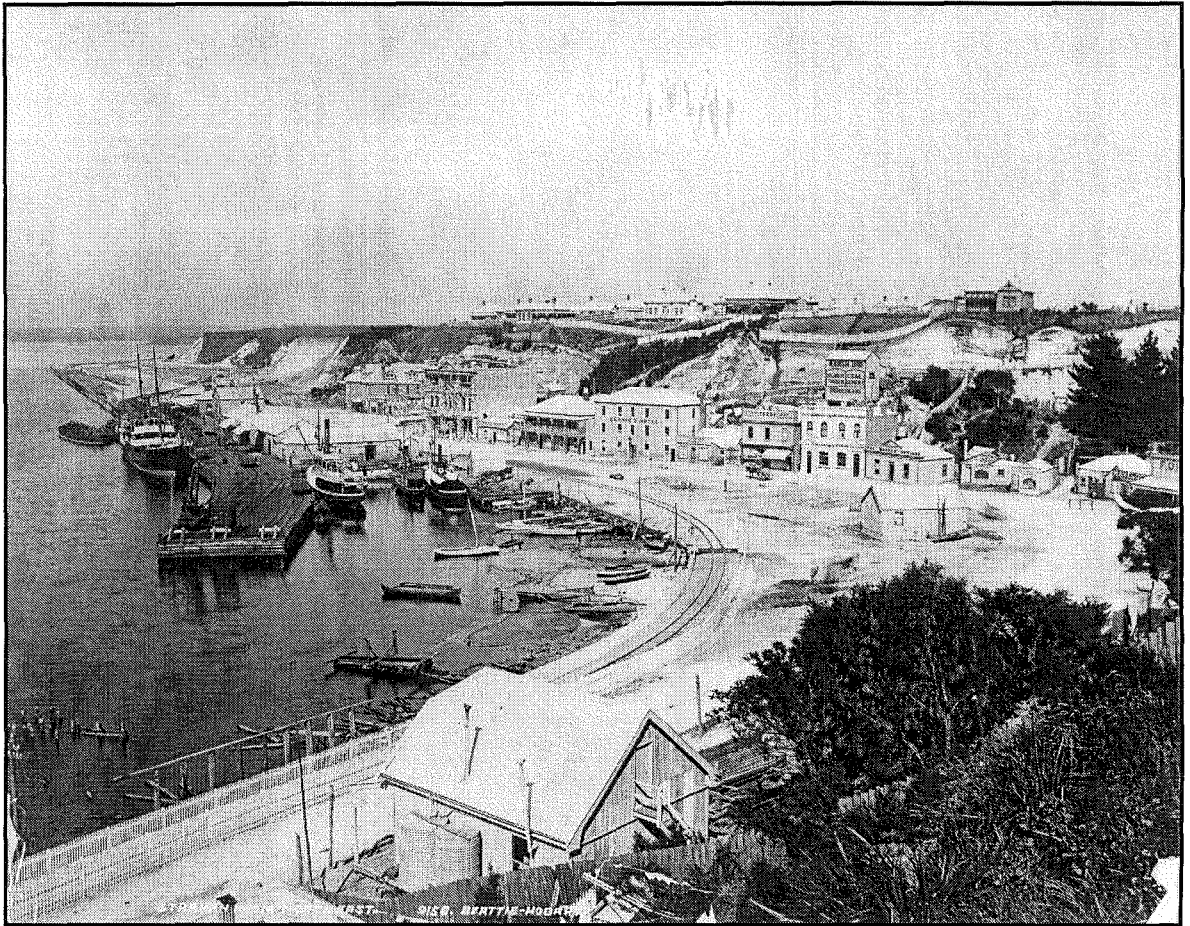
<sup>162</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 September 1900.

<sup>163</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 June 1901.

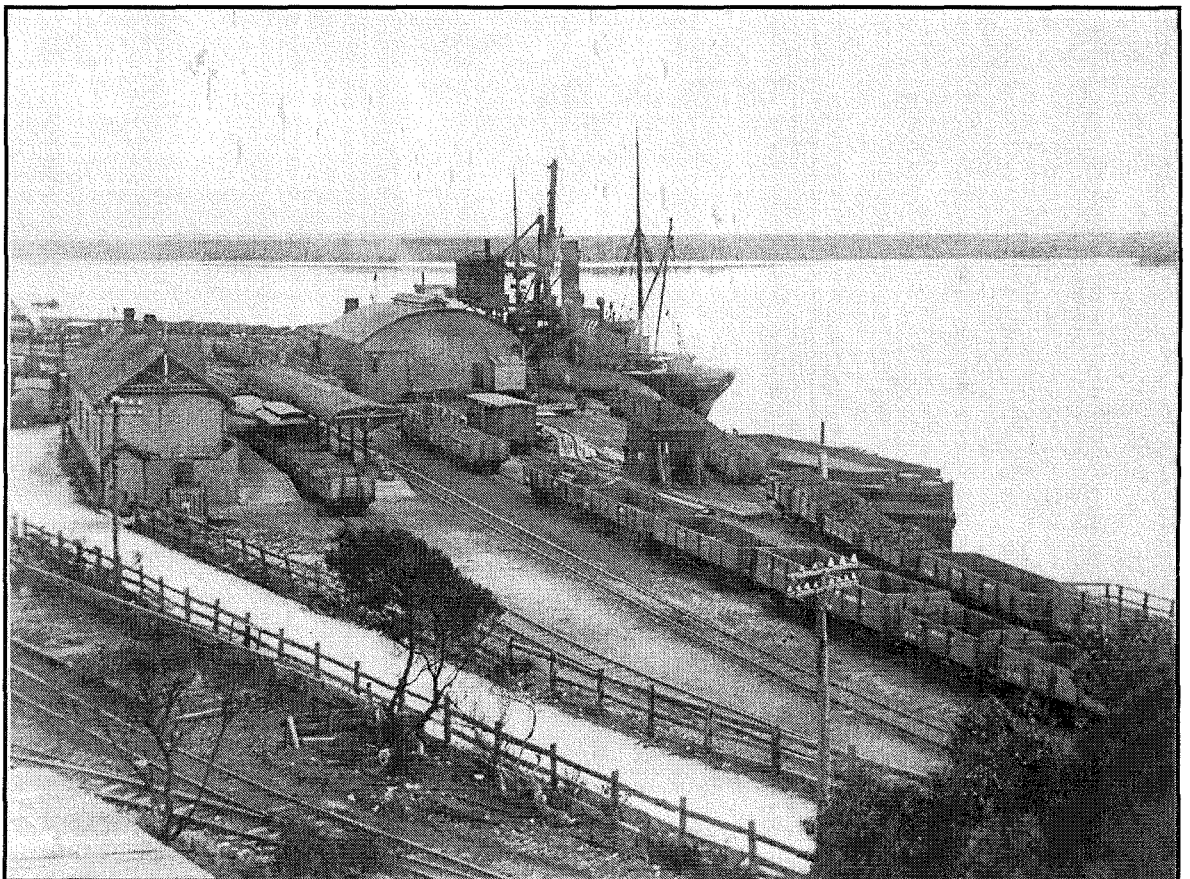
<sup>164</sup> P Mercer, *Gateway to Progress: Centenary History of the Marine Board of Burnie*, Burnie, 1969, p. 67.

<sup>165</sup> JPPP, *Tasmanian Government Railways: Report for 1900, 1901*, paper 13, p. 5.

<sup>166</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 July 1901.



STRAHAN WHARF – c. 1901



REGATTA POINT WHARF – c. 1935



substantial loan, whereas Zeehan was able to enjoy the benefits of competition and use the cheaper transport option through Burnie.<sup>167</sup>

The downturn in port trade affected the financial solvency of the Marine Board. It was unable to raise sufficient money to meet the principal and interest payments due to government. An attempt was made to induce Parliament to nationalise the Marine Board's loan, but the move proved unsuccessful. It did, however, cause a review of the basis of calculating the interest on the outstanding balance, that saw payments reduced by over £1,000 a year. This saving made the Board's position tenable for the time being.<sup>168</sup> Subsequent events revealed that the Zeehan traffic would have been lost in any case. The Zeehan silver mines collapsed shortly before World War 1, brought on by falling mineral reserves, the closure of the Zeehan smelters and a shortage of labour. The Emu Bay Railway Company fared poorly. For many years it struggled to survive the vagaries of the western mining districts it served, only paying its first dividend to shareholders in 1965, after sixty-eight years of operation.<sup>169</sup>

Activity through the port of Strahan continued to decline. Timber harvested from within the region became the major export. A number of mills were erected in and around Strahan to process the vast natural resources. Much attention was given to the unique Huon pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*).<sup>170</sup> By the early 1920s the port relied heavily on timber freight for its income. Strahan's two largest mills, the Pine Export Company Limited and the West Coast Timber Company Limited, were reported to pay 95% of the wages earned in the town. Without the timber produced by these mills there would have been little or no exports from the port.<sup>171</sup> Across the bay, the Mount Lyell Company's Regatta Point wharf flourished, the shortage of wharf accommodation always a problem. During 1935 Russell Murray investigated using the Strahan wharf to alleviate the overcrowded conditions at Regatta Point. He found only a small section was 'in proper repair to permit a ship coming along-side and even this is not suitable for unloading heavy cargoes.'<sup>172</sup>

The second wharf facility developed in the Macquarie Harbour region was at Teepookana. The need to develop the port four miles up the King River arose from the

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<sup>167</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 March 1905.

<sup>168</sup> Ware, *Strahan, Macquarie Harbour*, pp. 44 & 46.

<sup>169</sup> Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, p. 225.

<sup>170</sup> G Kerr & H McDermott, *The Huon Pine Story*, Victoria, Mainsail Books, 1999. This book provides an authoritative account of the milling of Huon pine and, to a lesser extent, other native timbers within the region.

<sup>171</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 March 1921.

<sup>172</sup> R Murray letter to the Company Secretary, 29 January 1935, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/357, pp. 176-177, AOT.

Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's inability at the time to raise sufficient capital to finance both its new smelters and the railway. On 28 August 1896 Parliament approved the *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1896*, which sanctioned the Company's temporary development at Teepookana, on the basis it extended its railway within five years to a terminus in or near the Town of Strahan, as approved by the Minister of Lands. At the time, the decision to build at Teepookana had saved the Company £35,100 by not extending the seven and a half miles into Strahan or £21,600 had it continued the four miles to its alternate port site at Pine Cove, near the mouth of the King River. Teepookana was chosen as the terminus due to its deepwater frontage to the King River and its ability to accommodate boats in times of severe flooding.<sup>173</sup>

Preliminary site preparation commenced at Teepookana<sup>174</sup> around September 1894. Originally referred to as "The Bar Rock," the site was located on the southern bank of the King River, just below a rocky outcrop that effectively barred water traffic from safely navigating any further upstream. Teepookana was surrounded by densely timbered stands of Myrtle, Sassafras, Celery Top pine, Huon pine, Horizontal and Leatherwood. In its early occupation, the confined landing area adjacent to the river comprised several temporary iron stores used for the perishable goods and an open area heaped in confusion with all sorts of building materials. Overlooking the landing, above the railway formation, was a terraced area that was earmarked as the site for the permanent settlement, the first building erected being the Teepookana Hotel.<sup>175</sup> Early transport between the Strahan wharf and Teepookana was facilitated by the *Kaa Ana*, a steam launch owned by T A Reynolds and Co. It carried about thirty passengers and took some fifty to sixty minutes to make the journey.<sup>176</sup>

Works on the wharf at Teepookana and the first mile of the railway line were completed around February 1895. By then four steam launches, affectionately referred to as the "Mosquito Fleet," were employed on the King River to service passenger and freight traffic.<sup>177</sup> During the railway construction the Mount Lyell Company limited the cartage of non-railway material to a minimum. The majority of the plant and equipment bound for the smelters was carted by drays over the road from Strahan. Upon the

<sup>173</sup> JPPP, *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix*, 1896, paper 58.

<sup>174</sup> The name Teepookana was of Aboriginal derivation meaning kingfisher, which was one of the most familiar birds in the locality. Its name was chosen by the Mount Lyell Company's engineer, Charles Wordsworth James, who preferred 'the euphonious native names to the harsher sounding and often inappropriate ones given to townships.' - *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 1 November 1894.

<sup>175</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 November 1894.

<sup>176</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 October 1894.

<sup>177</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 February 1895.

railway's completion through to Queenstown, on 18 July 1896, the volume of traffic carried each way increased markedly. Limited in room to handle and store the large volume of goods arriving daily at the wharf, Teepookana's crowded rail yards and incomplete station buildings presented a picture of chaos. Its ramshackle appearance caused one visitor to observe: 'At this particular point the trial of transit commences. It is the depot of [the] terminus of the Mount Lyell line, and goods for transmission to Queenstown or elsewhere are landed by steamer, but how the consignee suffers, no one but that individual knows. Personally, I have known perishable goods to lie for four days in the open, no heed being given to their condition or value.'<sup>178</sup>

Accounts vary as to the permanent population of the small settlement, with figures up to 300 proffered, although many are likely to have been railway construction workers.<sup>179</sup> The 1896 Valuation Roll for the District of Macquarie, shows town improvements of five houses, one hut, two stores, an office, a butcher's shop and store, a baker's shop and hut and a hotel and skittle alley.<sup>180</sup> The volume of freight traffic handled by the port continued to rise through 1896, forcing the Mount Lyell Company to upgrade the primitive handling and storage facilities. New improvements included a goods shed and office, a coke storage shed, extensions to the wharf and foundations for a wharf crane.<sup>181</sup> Upon the introduction of the regular train services on 21 December 1896, the volume of freight again increased, the monthly average handled during early 1897 reaching 2,100 tons. The continued growth in goods necessitated a further series of improvements to the transport facilities. These included a powerful revolving steam crane erected on the wharf for transshipping cargo from the lighters to the rail trucks and a wharf for small launches and landing platforms, for use by passengers. Further additions to the station yards and buildings occurred in the latter half of 1897 and again during 1898.<sup>182</sup>

The increasing volume of freight and shipping movements created major bottlenecks at Teepookana, particularly following delays occasioned by floods. The variable conditions on the King River made navigation difficult. In times of flood the USS Co.'s barges and lighters faced great difficulties battling the swiftly flowing river, while at low water the vessels often grounded on the troublesome bar at the entrance to

<sup>178</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 September 1896.

<sup>179</sup> C Snelgrove, *Results of an Archaeological Survey and Management Plan for Teepookana on the King River*, West Coast, Forestry Commission, 1992, pp. 24-28.

<sup>180</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 14 January 1896, pp. 243-245.

<sup>181</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30th September, 1896, p. 28, Queenstown.

<sup>182</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-Years ending 31st March, 1897, pp. 30-31, 30th September, 1897, p. 32, and 30 September 1898, p.27, Queenstown.

the river. The Mount Lyell Company investigated the possibility of constructing a breakwater at the mouth of the King River, and deepening the channel over the bar from three feet to fifteen feet.<sup>183</sup> Even in semi-difficult conditions, it was hard to manoeuvre and tow craft on the river, as evidenced by the 19 May 1897 sinking of a lighter loaded with fifty tons of blister copper just below Teepookana.<sup>184</sup> The limitations in the loads and the inevitable delays caused a frustrated Company Manager, Robert Sticht, to complain strongly to Head Office on several occasions about the utter impossibility of achieving regular shipments.<sup>185</sup> Initially adopted as a means for saving the Company money, Teepookana's practical life-span was predetermined both by its statutory limitations and by the port's inability to efficiently handle the growing volume of freight. Rather than use the full extent of its September 1901 deadline provisions, the Company wisely chose an early start, commencing in December 1898, on its seven and a half mile railway extension to Regatta Point.<sup>186</sup>

The completion of the railway proved to be of immense benefit for the Company and the people travelling to and from the Lyell area. It provided the Company with a far greater control over its freight movements and generated improved profits by capturing the entire traffic revenue between Regatta Point and Mount Lyell. The general public had been subjected to major delays, damages to freight and high transshipment costs, with 18 per cent of the traffic carried comprising privately-owned goods and perishable items. Not surprisingly the USS Co. had also experienced considerable difficulties in the management of its shipping activities between Strahan and Teepookana. The continual holdups and delays created cycles of boom and barren periods that made it difficult for the shipping company to provide a timely and cost efficient service in accordance with its contract provisions to the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>187</sup>

During the final year of operations, Teepookana handled 56,000 tons of freight. The annual export value of the Mount Lyell blister copper passing through the port was £735,305, comprising 28.3 per cent of Tasmania's total exports of £2,597,475.<sup>188</sup> Based on these figures, the small rainforest port of Teepookana was the third highest export revenue earning port in Tasmania, following closely behind Launceston (£825,437) and

<sup>183</sup> Annear, *'We find a way or make it,' A Cultural Heritage Survey of the Lower King River Valley*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>184</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 May 1897.

<sup>185</sup> R Sticht letters to the Company Secretary, 5 March 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/311, p. 532 and 5 July 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 20, AOT.

<sup>186</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-Year ending 31st March, 1899, p. 31, Queenstown.

<sup>187</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 November 1899.

Hobart (£846,342). Because the port at Strahan was the official point of receipt and discharge for all freight in and out of Macquarie Harbour, it and not Teepookana was officially credited with the export honour.<sup>189</sup> The 1 November 1899 opening of the rail extension through to Regatta Point proved a welcome relief for all concerned and enabled the Company to close the terminus at Teepookana to 'all launch and lighter traffic a fortnight later.'<sup>190</sup>

The announcement that the Mount Lyell Company intended to use Pine Cove as its preferred option for the terminus of its railway and for its wharf facilities invoked immediate concerns from a government that had been eager to see the railway extended into Strahan. A development at Pine Cove promised to draw traffic from the established port area of Strahan, and threatened to cause greater expense and inconvenience to the travelling public. The proposal threatened the need for duplicated customs services and other government infrastructure. The Pine Cove proposal also agitated the Strahan business community and speculators, who had paid high prices for land in East Strahan. Both groups had anticipated that the through connection to Mount Lyell would benefit their investments.<sup>191</sup>

The Company's reasons for choosing Pine Cove were compelling, or so it argued at the time. The proposal to use the existing port area of Strahan was flawed. It was greatly limited in size and apparently offered little scope for future expansion. No matter which site was chosen, the Company reasoned that it would have to construct its own wharves and ancillary amenities. Located on the northern shore of Macquarie Harbour, immediately to the south east of the mouth of the King River, Pine Cove offered sheltered and deepwater port facilities. It also met the requirements of the Company's 21 December 1892 enabling legislation, the *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act*, in that it fell within the extensive perimeter of the Strahan town boundary. Defending its choice of Pine Cove, the Company argued the port would reduce the length of its railway by three miles, remove the need for a second crossing of the King River and decrease railway operating costs. Importantly, an immediate saving of £12,000 could be achieved in construction expenses, which was of paramount importance to the temporarily cash-strapped Company.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for 1899-1900: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines, 1900, paper 63, page 15.

<sup>189</sup> *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac*, Imports, Exports, and Duty Collected, 1901, p. 271.

<sup>190</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-Year ending 31st March, 1900, pp. 8 and 24, Queenstown.

<sup>191</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 April 1894.

<sup>192</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1894, paper 59, p. 5.

The site at Pine Cove had been initially recommended in 1893 by the Company's engineer, Frederick Alfred Cutten, who had selected the controversial King River route, in preference to the alternate railway route, via the Tully River, into Strahan. At the time Cutten's preference had incurred the wrath of some of the Company's influential shareholders. It had also drawn the resignations of two of its senior surveyors, who strongly disagreed with the choice of the shorter but steeper path that ran via the King River to Pine Cove. At the time Cutten had not placed any great importance on extending the Company's railway through to Strahan. On being questioned by the Parliamentary Select Committee, appointed to consider the use of the 'Abt System,' Cutten flippantly observed that 'one could buy the whole of Strahan for £40,000, and put it down on the King River, and have a considerable balance left at the bank.'<sup>193</sup> Cutten considered the Pine Cove route to be the shortest, cheapest and most effective route with the sheltered inlet possessing 'a magnificent channel of water, with a perfect entrance to it 80 or 90 feet deep.'<sup>194</sup>

Prior to Cutten giving evidence to the Select Committee, Napier Bell had advised the Mount Lyell Company in December 1893 that he did not consider Pine Cove to be an ideal port as it was only suited to smaller vessels. The area identified by Cutten during his earlier railway survey was narrow and cramped for room and would impede the larger boats once they were able to access Macquarie Harbour. Extra expense would be incurred to extend the wharf into deeper water. Bell tactfully suggested to the Company that it consider continuing the railway from the King River to East Strahan, and link with government's railway. He advised the Company that if its railway terminated in Strahan, there was a greater chance that the government would acquire it.<sup>195</sup> In recommending the application to Parliament, the Select Committee noted there had been no settlement as yet at Pine Cove, whereas the ongoing 'lighterage of goods by way of the King River must be beneficial to Strahan.'<sup>196</sup>

The rapid expansion of the Company's activities at Mount Lyell during 1897 had highlighted to management the inefficiencies of the continued use of Teepookana. An internal review of the Company's port options by Superintending Engineer, Edward

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<sup>193</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, p. 10.

<sup>194</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1894, paper 59, p. 4.

<sup>195</sup> C Napier Bell, Report on the routes surveyed for the Mount Lyell Railway, 8 December 1893, NS 726/17, pp. 15-17, AOT.

<sup>196</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, 1896, paper 58, p. 6.

Carus Driffield, recommended the extension of the railway through to Strahan, at the expense of Pine Cove. Armed with this information, Sticht reported to his Board in December 1897 that:

The Company's business, both Smelting and otherwise, having grown to larger dimensions than was at first estimated, it is very likely that the facilities for wharve [sic] purposes &c at Pine Cove really would never be good enough. Various other considerations have also arisen since the Railway was first planned, making the alternative to Pine Cove of considerably less interest and value than the extension to Strahan.<sup>197</sup>

Sticht's reference to other considerations is likely to be the construction of the Emu Bay railway, which promised to benefit the Company once the rail link through to the port of Burnie was completed. Sticht was cognisant that Mount Lyell Company directors, Bowes Kelly (Chairman) and William Jamieson, were also appointees to the Emu Bay Railway Company's first Board of Directors. Before undertaking discussions on the final rail route with the government, Sticht directed his surveyors to mark a path around the shoreline between the proposed Regatta Point terminus and the government's line, which terminated on the Strahan wharf.<sup>198</sup>

The Company did not openly reveal its intentions to government, but continued to play a cat and mouse game. When questioned by the Select Committee, which had been convened in June 1898 to consider certain operational aspects of the Mount Lyell Company's railway, Driffield would not confirm that Pine Cove had been ruled out as the Company's preferred port. He left the response to Bowes Kelly, the Company's Chairman of Directors. Mindful of Bell's earlier advice, Kelly remained coy but he did advise the government that if it was willing to extend its twenty-one year compulsory purchase time limit (from 1892) then the Company would certainly agree to extending it railway through to Long Bay, Strahan.<sup>199</sup> Parliament acceded to Kelly's request. Section 4 of the *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1898*, passed 7 September 1898, deferred the government's option of compulsory purchase from 1913 until 1938. The Act protected the government's wishes by committing the Mount Lyell Company to extend its railway within three years to a point in the Town of Strahan or near Regatta Point, as approved by the Minister. The deals done, and the necessary concessions secured by each party, the issue of Pine Cove was resolved once and for all. The Company duly advised its shareholders in the latter half of 1898 that the completion of

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<sup>197</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 11 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 813, AOT.

<sup>198</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 11 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 813, AOT.

<sup>199</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1898, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1898, paper 34.

the through railway to Regatta Point would greatly facilitate and cheapen the handling and carriage of freight.<sup>200</sup>

With Pine Cove no longer an option, the Mount Lyell Company was committed to construct its railway through to Regatta Point. Extension works commenced in December 1898. At the same time the selected foreshore site at Regatta Point was cleared, the ground drained and excavations made for the station, wharf and other building improvements. On completion, the 300 feet long wharf would provide a low water depth of 16 to 20 feet, which was ample given that larger boats were unable to negotiate the entrance into Macquarie Harbour. To facilitate the construction of the railway, the first 50 feet section of wharf was progressed as a priority, to enable it to be used as a landing stage for rails and other materials. Bridge and wharf construction expert Arthur Purdy supervised the building of the wharf and Strahan contractor Fred Grining supplied the 60 feet long piles for the outer wharf.<sup>201</sup>

Despite the agreement with the government to build its line into Strahan, the Company was heavily criticised, both in the *Mercury* and by the local community, for locating its port facilities at Regatta Point. The protagonists preferred a site closer to the existing Strahan wharf as the town was already too scattered and its few existing amenities were stretched to the limit. On top of this impost, the townsfolk feared they would be taxed for the road works required between the two railways and then charged for the conveyance each time they had to travel between the two operations.<sup>202</sup> Responding to the *Mercury*, Robert Sticht advised that in view of the large quantities of coke, coal and other materials to be landed, the Regatta Point site was vastly superior to the cramped setting at the Strahan wharf. Sticht considered the construction of the railway between East Strahan and Regatta Point 'will ere long be undertaken at the proper time, either by Government, this Company, or by some mutual arrangement.'<sup>203</sup>

Sticht's response quelled the immediate criticism. The Regatta Point port facilities comprised a substantial timber wharf with 570 feet of water frontage and a rotating steam crane, that facilitated the efficient discharge of freight direct from the steamers into the waiting railway trucks. The depth of water at the wharf was eighteen feet, enabling larger boats to berth once the harbour improvements had been

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<sup>200</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1898, pp. 8-9, Queenstown.

<sup>201</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1899.

<sup>202</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 January 1899.

<sup>203</sup> R Sticht letter to The Editor, Hobart Mercury, 22 February 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/313, pp. 327-328, AOT.



completed.<sup>204</sup> On 16 March 1900 customs facilities were officially established at Regatta Point.<sup>205</sup> A satisfied Robert Sticht reported to the Chairman and Board of Directors that the Regatta Point facilities for berthing ships and discharging and loading cargo were proving adequate for all present requirements.<sup>206</sup>

Sticht's observations proved to be short-term. Over the majority of its working life, Regatta Point was to be dogged by a lack of adequate storage for incoming and outgoing freight. Until July 1903 the Regatta Point facility had coped with the cargo on offer, aided significantly by an earlier agreement with the Emu Bay Railway Company to rail freight the coke and coal direct between Burnie and Queenstown. The situation changed with the completion of the first stage of Napier Bell's harbour works in 1902, which saw the USS Co. vessels able to carry loads in excess of 800 tons into the port. The acquisition of the North Mount Lyell holdings in May 1903, and the subsequent downgrading of the Kelly Basin facilities, further limited room. The introduction of the larger ships onto the West Coast route had enabled the Mount Lyell Company to negotiate a new five year freight and lighterage agreement with the USS Co. in June 1903, 'at greatly reduced rates.'<sup>207</sup> This pressure for space further increased in the latter half of 1904 when the Company commenced regular shipments of pyrites from Regatta Point to its Yarraville Acid Works in Victoria.<sup>208</sup>

Over the years the Company was able to effect a number of improvements to help it cope with the heavy demands on its port facilities. In 1909 the wharf area was extended fifty feet and an additional pyrites store was built.<sup>209</sup> A major disadvantage was that only one vessel could berth at a time, the larger "K" class boats being 250 feet in length. Major problems arose when two large boats, each loaded with up to 800 tons of coke and coal, arrived in port at the same time. Although the ships' schedules were rigidly planned, they were often thrown askew due to unavoidable delays caused by rough seas and strong tidal currents through the Macquarie Heads. Until the first cargo of coke and coal had been cleared from the port area, there was no room to unload the next. The USS Co. was able to provide a temporary respite to the problem by storing

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<sup>204</sup> EC Driffield, Half-yearly report to General Manager, 31 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/315, p. 697, AOT.

<sup>205</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 20 March 1900.

<sup>206</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1900, pp. 24-25, Queenstown.

<sup>207</sup> EC Driffield, Superintending Engineer, report to R Sticht, General Manager, 14 April 1904, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, pp. 762-763, AOT.

<sup>208</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1905, p. 28, Queenstown.

<sup>209</sup> EC Driffield, Superintending Engineer, report to R Sticht, General Manager, 13 October 1909, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/325, pp. 341-342, AOT.

the coal in lighters that it moored in close proximity about Long Bay. By 1913 it had accumulated six of these vessels, their total storage capacity being 750 tons. Even with this added off-shore storage capacity, albeit an inefficient method that required double handling, the Mount Lyell Company considered even more lighters were required to handle the traffic flows.<sup>210</sup>

Looking for a permanent solution to the problem, both the Mount Lyell Company and the USS Co. approached the Marine Board of Strahan in 1913 to dredge the area immediately off the wharf, to improve the access and depth for the larger boats. The matter again surfaced in 1916 following the grounding of the *Koonya*. The Board advised the Company that it was unable to dredge the area due to the bottom comprising heavy clay. The Harbour Master suggested the Company extend its Regatta Point Wharf some 20 feet out from the land, at the Company's cost. An unimpressed Local Superintendent, Basil Sawyer, reported to the Company's Secretary: 'The Wharf was built at our expense, and the Marine Board has contributed nothing whatever towards maintenance and upkeep during [sic] past 18 years, although the Board's revenue from us for wharfage averages £1760 per annum, exclusive of the substantial harbour dues paid by the U.S.S. CO.'<sup>211</sup>

Onshore facilities at Regatta Point were also added and included new pyrites ore bins, a ten-ton crane from Kelly Basin, and an overhead gantry for loading the ore into the boats, all in 1923.<sup>212</sup> A second grab crane was purchased in 1927<sup>213</sup> and new overhead bins were built in 1928, to store the Electrolytic Zinc Company's calcines.<sup>214</sup> Unlike the Strahan wharves, the Regatta Point operations had not been unduly affected by the opening of the Emu Bay Railway nor by the mining slump in the Zeehan and Dundas Districts. Since its opening in 1899, Regatta Point remained the dominant industrial port for the region, serviced primarily by the USS Company. Cramped for area, the port relied on an effective railway system and the tight scheduling of shipping services. These two factors enabled the movement of cargo in a timely and efficient manner. It was not until 1953, when the Mount Lyell Company built a second wharf

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<sup>210</sup> EC Driffield, Superintending Engineer, report to B Sawyer, Local Superintendent, 6 September 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, pp. 501-505, AOT.

<sup>211</sup> B Sawyer, Local Superintendent, letter to Company Secretary, 23 November 1917, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/334, p. 660, AOT.

<sup>212</sup> EC Driffield, Superintending Engineer, report to R Murray, General Manager, 10 October 1923, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, p. 179, AOT.

<sup>213</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 7 January 1927, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/348, p. 409, AOT.

<sup>214</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 13 November 1928, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/350, p. 249, AOT.

and a conveyor system to handle its greatly expanded pyrites exports, that the restricted operations at Regatta Point were changed to any significant degree.<sup>215</sup>

The last of the five ports, Pine Cove included, was located twenty-three miles by water from Strahan, at Kelly Basin.<sup>216</sup> Sited on the northern side of Macquarie Harbour, within a long narrow bay, the bay was about a mile and a half in length and three quarters of a mile wide. The area had been named after explorer Captain James Kelly, who had first visited Macquarie Harbour in December 1816. The proponents of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company considered the area to be well-suited for its port activities and rail terminus as it provided sheltered and deep water facilities. Unlike Regatta Point, there was ample flat land for the port facilities. At the Select Committee's 1897 hearings, the North Mount Lyell promoters noted the port's close proximity to the Gordon River and the surrounding pinning areas. The Company considered its port and railway amenities would greatly assist the timber industry and would also promote the development of about 2,000 acres of good agricultural land around the Basin.<sup>217</sup> Surveyor-General, Edward Counsel, was equally enthusiastic in his description of Kelly Basin. He considered that it presented as a very suitable spot for a terminus, was well located to clay and ballast deposits and offered a most eligible site for town allotments. Counsel added that 'there is fair accommodation for shipping in Kelly Basin, and bold water almost to the shoreline, and the land is well formed for drainage and town purposes.'<sup>218</sup>

The Company's port facilities at Kelly Basin were divided into two distinct locations, the eastern-shore development that comprised an 800 feet long jetty, nine feet wide and laid with both 3' 6" and 2' gauge rails to facilitate railway and tramway traffic. The jetty was built by Hobart contractors, J and R Duff Brothers. It was equipped with a two ton travelling crane. Twelve feet deep at the end of the jetty, it was primarily used for the loading of bricks manufactured at the Company's substantial brick kilns, and timber from the sawmill, both operations being located immediately inland. A mile around the western shore of the Basin, within Roach's Inlet, were the railway terminus, main pier and wharf area. Also built by Duff Brothers, the 400 feet long timber decked

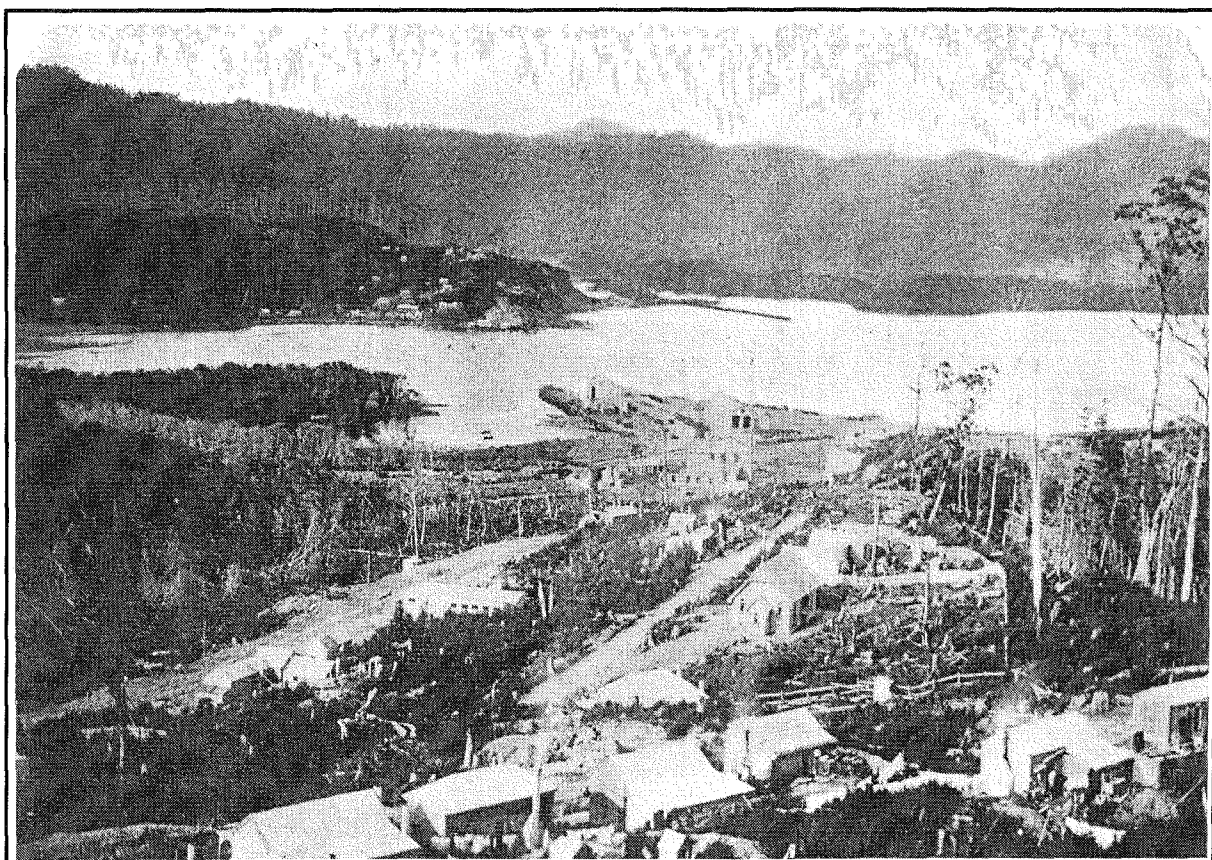
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<sup>215</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Accounts for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1953, p. 3, Queenstown.

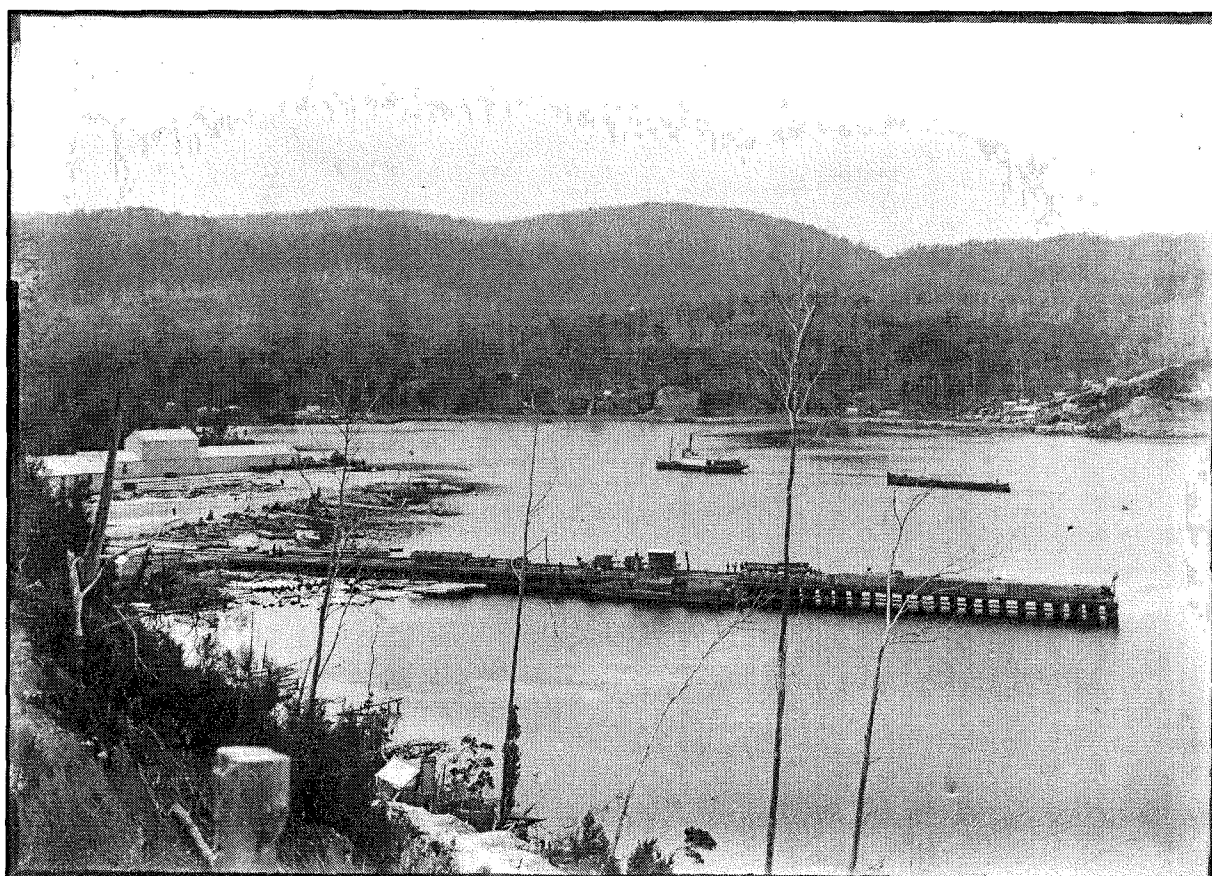
<sup>216</sup> The majority of early reports and references prior to 1899 make reference to Kelly's Basin, from hereafter Kelly Basin became the more common term. In 1959 the Nomenclature Board officially assigned the name Kelly Basin in pursuance to the *Survey Co-Ordination Act 1944*, Tasmanian Government Gazette, 30 September 1959, page 1649. For the purposes of this thesis I have used Kelly Basin throughout so as to avoid confusion.

<sup>217</sup> JPPP, *The Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1897, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1897*, paper 68.

<sup>218</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 April 1898.



**WEST PILLINGER AND RAILWAY WHARF, c. 1902**



**KELLY BASIN AND MAIN WHARF – c. 1902**

wharf provided an average water depth of sixteen feet and reached a maximum of twenty-four feet.<sup>219</sup> The wharf was primarily intended to service the harbour and coastal trade. It was twenty-five feet six inches wide, had two lines of rails and featured a ten-ton travelling crane to facilitate freight handling. Adjacent to the wharf was the railway pier, which extended 400 feet out into Kelly Basin. Of sturdy wooden construction, it was thirty feet wide and provided a depth of twenty-seven feet, sufficient to accommodate the largest ocean-going ships entering the harbour. Timber decked, the pier had three lines of rails and was specifically designed to facilitate the transfer of heavy freight from ship to shore.<sup>220</sup> The cost of the wharf, pier and jetty amounted to £5,728 14s.3d.<sup>221</sup>

The area immediately behind the wharf and pier comprised five acres, much of which was reclaimed and levelled and occupied by the railway terminus, storage sheds and the customs office. Before these works, the area had been but 'a rank morass covered with an almost impenetrable undergrowth and stunted tea-tree scrub.'<sup>222</sup> Wharf and building amenities at the Kelly Basin terminus were superior to those of the other ports in the harbour, the railway pier alone being capable of berthing four vessels at a time. Buildings included a commodious goods shed (140' x 21'), a machine shop, engine shed (100' x 30'), an ore-crushing, weighing and bagging shed (200' x 30'), capable of treating upwards of twenty-tons per hour, and the passenger station and office building.<sup>223</sup>

During the construction of the North Mount Lyell railway and the Company's smelters at Crotty, the wharf facilities were kept particularly busy with the arrival of plant, machinery, railway materials, engines and rolling stock. The 26 June 1899 arrival of the Company's specially built steamer, *North Lyell*, on its maiden trip, marked a special occasion. Weighing 2,027 tons gross and measuring 310 feet in length, the boat greatly impressed everyone and was described as 'the largest steamer that has ever floated in the waters of Port Macquarie.'<sup>224</sup> For reasons not fully explained, the USS Co. withdrew the *North Lyell* from the West Coast run and subsequently serviced the port with its fleet of smaller coastal vessels. The port commenced handling the export

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<sup>219</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 28 September 1898.

<sup>220</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 June 1899.

<sup>221</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company, 6 February 1898 to 26 November 1900, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>222</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 February 1899.

<sup>223</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 December 1900.

<sup>224</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 June 1899.

ore from the North Mount Lyell mine following the opening of the railway to through traffic on 24 September 1900.<sup>225</sup>

Before the September 1901 commencement of smelting operations at Crotty, substantial quantities of high grade copper ore were crushed, bagged and exported from Kelly Basin. After the start of smelting operations, large quantities of coke, coal and ironstone were imported for use in the inefficient furnaces. The port was also kept busy handling general cargo for the Lyell region, particularly for the towns of Gormanston, North Lyell, Linda, Crotty, Darwin and Pillinger. Huon pine logs were handled through the port and featured rafts of up to 200 logs being towed in from the Gordon River.<sup>226</sup> Celery Top pine was harvested for a time and exported to Adelaide.<sup>227</sup> Unfortunately for the North Mount Lyell Copper Company, its smelting operations did not prosper. In the months leading up to the signing of the 22 May 1903 amalgamation agreement, activity waned considerably at Kelly Basin. Blainey is correct in describing the complex as 'one of the best equipped of the smaller Australian ports, Kelly Basin not only reflected lofty ambitions but also sheer extravagance.'<sup>228</sup>

The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* was far from flattering in its May 1903 description of the down turn in port activities, stating that Kelly Basin remained 'shunned by all self-respecting crows...an unrealised dream of greatness.'<sup>229</sup> The Mount Lyell Company recognised the substantial nature of the wharf facilities and their excellent condition, but did not want to actively maintain two ports. Kelly Basin was isolated and, unlike Regatta Point, did not offer the through rail connection to the rest of Tasmania. In August 1903 Sticht considered the future of the port to be limited unless the entirely unforeseen and unexpected was to happen. He anticipated the USS Co. would downgrade its service to Kelly Basin and use smaller vessels to ply between Regatta Point and Kelly Basin, 'which are sufficiently serviceable to do the Harbour traffic.'<sup>230</sup>

Activity at Kelly Basin was reduced again following the amalgamation, with the port's activities confined to timber, coke and coal for the railway and small amounts of supplies for the dwindling population still living in the area and along the North Mount Lyell railway line. By 1915 the utility of the port had diminished. The railway pier was

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<sup>225</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 September 1900.

<sup>226</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 July 1901.

<sup>227</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 November 1901.

<sup>228</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 130.

<sup>229</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 May 1903.

<sup>230</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 August 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, pp. 39-41, AOT.

in a bad state of repair, and was unsuited to load cargo without considerable work. Lacking in ready storage, an unavailability of labour and a reduced railway capacity, freight loads for non-Company purposes had to be limited to fifty tons at a time.<sup>231</sup> In 1918, the railway pier was badly damaged by fire. The remainder of the superstructure had decayed, and it was unusable without a considerable financial outlay.<sup>232</sup>

As the firewood and other traffic was cut out along the North Mount Lyell railway, the remaining wharf facilities declined in condition, to the extent that in 1923 they were practically disused. The December 1924 visit to Kelly Basin by the Select Committee, convened to consider the closure of the North Mount Lyell railway between Kelly Basin and Darwin, confirmed that the settlement was on its last legs. Russell Murray reported that the Committee viewed the general circumstances of Kelly Basin as a calamity and a tragedy, and expressed the opinion that the Committee could see no hope of the railway ever being required, or of anything happening that could revive the place as a port.<sup>233</sup> On receiving Parliamentary approval to close the Kelly Basin end of the line, the Company dismantled the railway in 1925 and moved the iron and two of the three Avonside locomotives to Regatta Point.<sup>234</sup>

## Conclusions

In his assessment of the government's role in dealing with the Macquarie Harbour improvements, Glyn Roberts considers that it was slow to come to terms with the issues, which resulted in significant shipping losses. Roberts criticises the government for not encouraging a rational approach by the competing mining companies in developing the rich deposits around Mount Lyell that had resulted in the duplication of smelters and railways.<sup>235</sup> To an extent, Roberts' observations are correct. The government did procrastinate over the Macquarie Harbour improvements, but there were a number of mitigating circumstances behind the delays, as discussed in the chapter. There is little doubt successive governments hesitated to spend large sums of money within such an isolated area, particularly given the history and vagaries of the

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<sup>231</sup> Local Superintendent letter to Company Secretary, 12 February 1915, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/331, pp. 24-26, AOT.

<sup>232</sup> R Sticht letter to J Butters, Hydro-Electric Department, 30 April 1918, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/677, pp. 782-784, AOT.

<sup>233</sup> R Murray letter to Butler McIntyre & Butler, Company Solicitors, 9 December 1924, Staff Letters, NS 1711/558, pp. 68-71, AOT.

<sup>234</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 24 April 1925, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/347, pp. 16-17, AOT.

<sup>235</sup> G Roberts, 'The Tasmanian Government and the Metal Mining Industry – An Administrative History: 1880-1914', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002, p. 315.

early mining fields and the large sums of money already lost by private investors within the region.

When in 1898, government finally committed to partially funding the harbour works, it did so knowing that another sinking on the bar would not be tolerated. It would have also gained considerable confidence from the success and anticipated longevity of the smelting operations at Mount Lyell. The Mount Lyell Company was credited with converting 'promises into performances, to redeem the credit of the colony, to lift it into [a] prominent position as a field for remunerative enterprise, to stimulate its progress with respect to every branch of trade and commerce, and set its feet very firmly upon the high road leading to assured prosperity.'<sup>236</sup>

While Mount Lyell rose quickly to a position of dominance in the region, the government owned enterprises suffered at the expense of the Company and through other private enterprise operations. Freight volumes carried over the once lucrative Strahan to Zeehan railway were heavily reduced with the opening of the Ému Bay railway through to Burnie. The completion of its ambitious port expansion program at Strahan coincided with the downturn in traffic from Zeehan. The government was an easy target for criticism on the West Coast, spending too little, wasting too much or simply favouring other ports, while the local marine board struggled to remain solvent as it repaid its government debts. It would be later argued that while government may have created individual liabilities, it made 'provision for the betterment of the whole.'<sup>237</sup>

Government could do little to prevent the duplication of amenities in the region, including the ports, as proposed by Roberts. The feud between the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Companies was bitter. Both looked to vastly different methods to process their ores. Their railways traversed separate mining and timber fields and the sharing of port facilities was not an option. Competition between companies was considered healthy and it was anticipated the Mount Lyell field could support more than one entity.

While governments, marine boards, companies hostile and friendly, all struggled to come to grips with their transport ventures within the wilderness, the Mount Lyell Company controlled every aspect of its transport operations. It dominated all players, as they competed for a share of the Company's freight. Macquarie Harbour played an important role in the Company's domination and competition strategies. To ensure the waterway remained open, the Mount Lyell Company provided an interest-free loan to

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<sup>236</sup> *Australian Mining Standard*, Special edition on Tasmania and its Mining Wealth, 1 July 1898, p. 10.

<sup>237</sup> Ware, *Strahan, Macquarie Harbour*, p. 44.



the Strahan Marine Board, helping it to effect training wall improvements and repay its government debt.<sup>238</sup>

The frustrations experienced by the community that had been caused by government's ongoing delay in resolving the harbour issues were similarly felt by the mining companies and communities that awaited on government to develop tracks and roads to service the region. The following chapter looks at the early ad hoc development of tracks and roads about the area, the lack of appropriate funding and the long and unnecessary delay before funds were finally committed to extend the road from Hobart.

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<sup>238</sup> R Murray letter to Master Warden, 2 August 1922, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/680, pp. 159-160, AOT.

## CHAPTER 4: TRACKS AND ROADS – A SLOW BEGINNING 1893 - 1935

### Introduction

The strategies applied by successive Governments for developing exploration tracks on Tasmania's West Coast, through the 1880s and into the early 1890s, were generally products of public pressure and political opportunism. The trial and error approach saw much time, effort and valuable resources channelled into non-productive tracks. The combination of difficult topography, dense vegetation, boggy soils and a wet climate was not conducive to the construction of exploration tracks on the West Coast. A concerted and systematic approach to developing a network of exploration and pack-tracks was required. Deputy Surveyor-General, Edward Counsel, criticised the government's approach to track-cutting on the West Coast. He considered the area would remain undeveloped should exploration be left to the unaided efforts of private enterprise. Counsel disapproved of the Public Works Department's control over the works, when it was the District Surveyors from the Survey Department who were on-site and had a good understanding of the area.<sup>1</sup> Travel by track about the Lyell region had improved little since the early prospectors first made their way overland to the Mount Lyell area during the 1880s and early 1890s.

Like the tracks, the development of the roads in the colony were retarded by difficult conditions. The history of the roads in the colony was 'one of overcoming obstacles, of crossing rivers which changed with the season from easily-passed fords in the dry months, to raging rain-swollen torrents which swept away low bridges...travellers by road, on horseback or in carts, faced the discomfort of long, jolting, jarring hours over irregular road surfaces.'<sup>2</sup> The first road to the West Coast was the fifty mile dray track between Waratah and the port of Emu Bay. This roughly built thoroughfare caused total frustration. First used in 1873, it was a morass for nine months of the year. Wagons were repeatedly bogged under the weight of the heavy ore.<sup>3</sup> On the North West Coast, the roads were bad in autumn and worse in winter. Robson comments 'the result was not only isolation but economic disaster because

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<sup>1</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Survey Department: Annual Report of the Deputy Surveyor-General, 1892, paper 76, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> L Newitt, *Convicts & Carriageways*, Hobart, Department of Main Roads, 1988, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> P Mercer, *Gateway to Progress – A Centenary History of the Marine Board of Burnie*, Burnie, Marine Board of Burnie, 1969, p. 61.

selectors could not get their produce to the coastal ports and a market on other than ruinous terms.’<sup>4</sup>

In the harsher West Coast climate and country, the roads fared worse still. During the first decade of development about the Lyell region attempts to build and maintain roads were unsuccessful, as was the experience with the dray road between Strahan and Lynch’s Creek. Irrespective of whether they were gravelled or corded, the roads were unsuited to the prevailing conditions. They were expensive to build and maintain and were often reduced to boggy mires. Corded timber was too slippery for men and animals to negotiate. In 1893 the government’s Geological Surveyor, Alexander Montgomery, acknowledged the failings of the early roads. He noted that in the steep and difficult West Coast terrain, horse drawn and light steam tramways proved beneficial. They were ‘both cheaper and better than roads, if the latter are to be anything better than mere sloughs and to be of a character to sustain heavy and continuous traffic.’<sup>5</sup>

The eventual deployment of tramways and railways about the Lyell region proved very successful but they did not meet the immediate requirements for ongoing exploration, nor could they provide access to the towns about Mount Lyell or the more difficult terrain in the outlying districts. The overland movement of stock from the distant farming areas in the north west, north and to the east of the colony had to be facilitated. Despite their many shortfalls, the tracks and roads were of extreme importance to the Lyell region. The network of short-haul roads connecting the mining towns, rail-heads and nearby mines greatly facilitated access and reduced the degree of isolation for the local population.

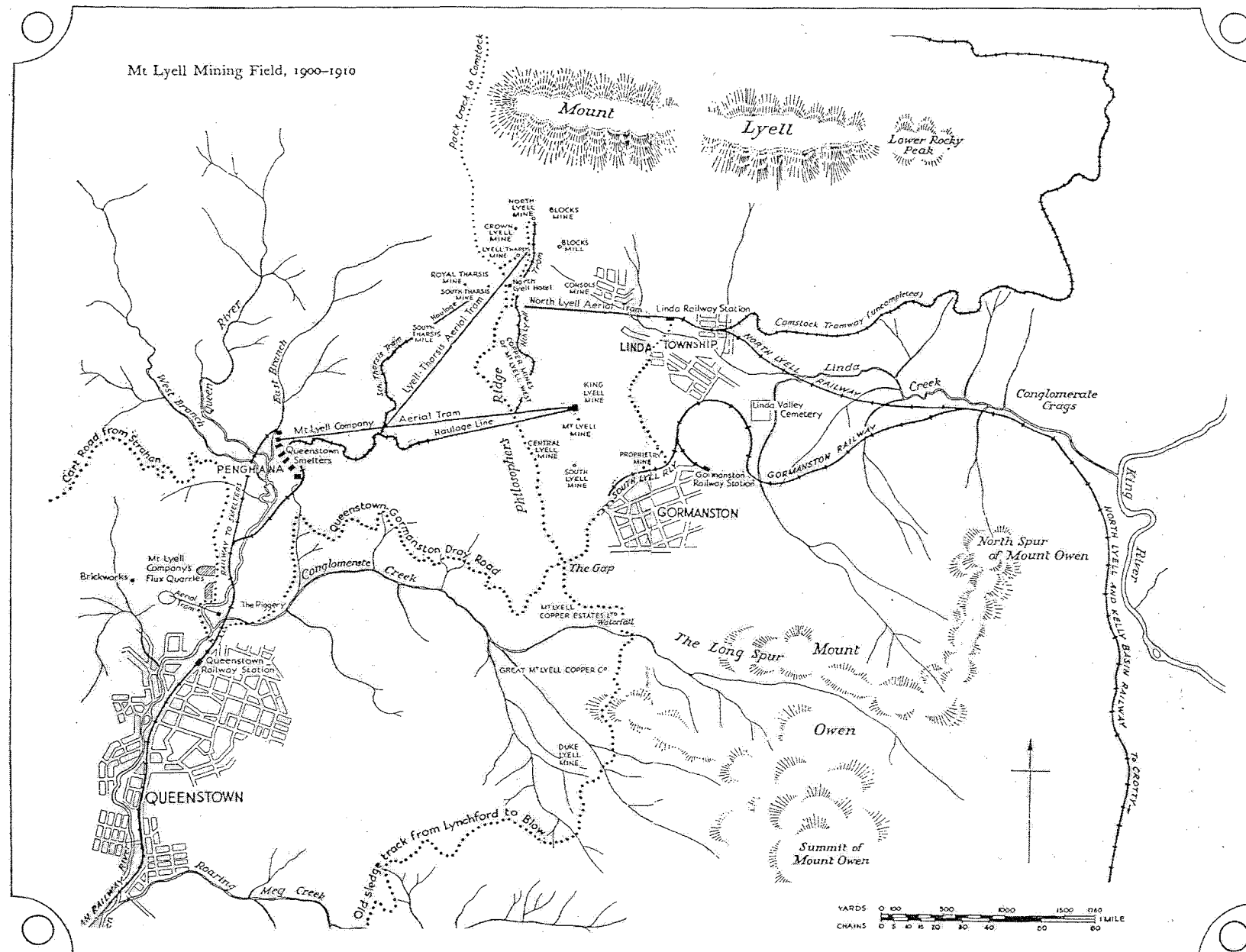
This chapter outlines the importance of tracks to assist the exploration of the mineral country, both within the immediate confines of the Lyell region and the outlying areas, from the early 1890s through to 1914. It examines the government’s initial mismanagement of the track program, its sudden about-face, and the implementation of systematic program of building tracks to encourage exploration. It also looks at the trend in later years to promote the use of tracks for tourism and recreational activities. The chapter also outlines the development of the short-haul roads about the Lyell area and the eventual acceptance of motor vehicles once their reliability improved and road construction techniques advanced. The completion of the

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<sup>4</sup> L Robson, *A History of Tasmania: Volume II Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3: Report on the Progress of the Mineral Fields of the County of Montagu, 20 May 1893, paper 50, p. 4.

MAP 13 - MOUNT LYELL MINING FIELD, 1900-1910



West Coast road dramatically affected the Lyell community lifestyles. The final section of this chapter details the removal of the barriers of isolation and reclaiming of the West Coast as a province of Tasmania.<sup>6</sup>

### **Early Track Developments about Mount Lyell**

This section examines the development of the countryside through the construction of exploration and pack-tracks about the Lyell area during the period 1893 to 1900. It proved to be a time of great frustration, with government allocating little in the way of resources and money for new works. Of the few projects that were undertaken, only a small number opened up new land for prospecting. About the West Coast, the quality and type of track construction varied considerably. In most instances vegetation, terrain, and climate governed track standards. Inclement weather made life difficult for all travellers. It reduced the best-formed tracks and roads into muddy quagmires, impassable to all traffic.

Charles Whitham identified the two grades of track used to open-up the West Coast, and noted that any bush track in the region was only a temporary trail that was soon obliterated within a few years unless regularly repaired. This was seldom the case. The first grade of track was the foot-track or exploration track. It was 'a narrow path, sometimes only lightly cut out, with blazes on the trees and on the logs, which are left lying across the trail. The creeks are sometimes bridged by logs – generally not; and the grade may be anything up to perpendicular.'<sup>7</sup> Evolving from the exploration track was the pack-track, generally of a more substantial construction. Used to pack supplies to the mines and settlements, and serving as a thoroughfare between districts, the pack-track was a precursor to roads, tramways and railways. A pack-track was generally '4 to 6 feet wide, indifferently well-graded, corduroyed in the soft places, and provided with bridges over the creeks, so that pack-horses may be taken along.'<sup>8</sup>

Establishing an extensive network of tracks about the Mount Lyell field was considered essential for the efficient exploration of the area. As new mineral deposits were uncovered, more pressure was exerted on government to improve access to outlying mines. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* supported the call, advising that 'the field has established a claim to the expenditure on it of a very large share of any money available for tracks or tramways – we do not mention roads, for they have proved

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<sup>6</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>7</sup> C Whitham, *Western Tasmania: A Land of Riches and Beauty*, Queenstown, Robert Sticht Memorial Library, 1949 (reprint of 1923 version), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania: A Land of Riches and Beauty*, p. 62.

unsuitable to a mining district like this.’<sup>9</sup> The *Herald* actively promoted mining on the West Coast and continually agitated for government to open up the unexplored areas with tracks, particularly along the overland route between Ouse and Mount Lyell. The paper argued that the immense revenue gained from mining was sufficient reason for Government to spend ‘a very small sum, say a thousand pounds...to let the light into this *terra incognita*.’<sup>10</sup>

The *Herald*’s push for new exploration tracks was supported by three senior civil servants. In October 1895 the Secretary for Mines, Francis Belstead, acknowledged that much of the West Coast remained unexplored. He endorsed the government’s Geological Surveyor, Alexander Montgomery, in his contention that the Tasmanian mineral industry ‘is one of its most important sources of wealth, and bids fair to increase in importance as the wilder and more inaccessible portions of the country become opened up to prospectors.’<sup>11</sup> The following year the Surveyor-General, Edward Counsel, in his annual report to Parliament, openly criticised successive governments that, since 1880, had been very tardy in allocating funds for exploration tracks on the West Coast. Counsel was a long-term advocate of development through exploration.<sup>12</sup> His disparaging report questioned the very basis of the existing track-works, stating they ‘cannot be said to have been carried out under any methodical system of arrangement.’<sup>13</sup> Counsel strongly commended the importance of track-cutting to government. He considered the works to be ‘a main factor in the early and profitable development of the unexplored regions of the Island; but the undertaking, to prove in every way successful, must be initiated under an organised and general scheme, to be carried on year by year during the summer months.’<sup>14</sup>

The year before Counsel’s outburst, the government boosted funding for the West Coast by allocating £1,000 to roads, bridges, tracks and emergent works. A separate sum of £500 was set aside for the overland track between Marlborough and Mount Lyell.<sup>15</sup> In 1896 Counsel oversaw three government initiated surveys undertaken by Thomas Frodsham, Edward George Innes and George Meredith. They were

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<sup>9</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 May 1894.

<sup>10</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1895.

<sup>11</sup> JPPP, The Mining Industry of Tasmania: Paper read by Mr. F. Belstead, Secretary of Mines, at the Annual Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1895, 1896, paper 1, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> A Elias, ‘Edward Albert Counsel (1849-1939),’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Volume 8, pp. 121-122.

<sup>13</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1895, 1896, paper 47, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1895, 1896, paper 47, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1895, 1895, paper 49, p. 5.

commissioned to locate an alternative overland route to the West Coast. The area chosen for the investigations comprised the vast undeveloped tract between Tyenna, near Glenora in the Derwent Valley, and the highest navigable point on the Gordon River. In trying weather conditions, Frodsham examined the country between Mount Humboldt and the Linda Track, to the west of Mount Arrowsmith. He estimated the distance of his track from Hobart via Russell's Falls, the Florentine, Gordon and Denison Rivers, to the junction of the Linda Track, to be 118 miles. The majority of the terrain was easy going, except the westernmost portion, which comprised numerous hills and gullies. Frodsham considered that little would be gained from adopting this route because the existing track from Hobart, via Ouse and Marlborough, to the Linda Track junction, was 124 miles and followed easier grades.<sup>16</sup>

Innes and party commenced their survey on 12 May 1896, examining the land between Mount Humboldt and the headwaters on the Gordon River. Like Frodsham, Innes experienced exceptionally bad weather. The men struggled in the difficult terrain and took a little over twelve weeks to complete the arduous expedition. Upon reflection, Innes considered the mission a failure. He reported that 'even supposing all other difficulties surmounted, the Frankland and Wilmot Ranges, standing as they do directly across the route, present a barrier over which it is impossible to climb with a road of any description unless at an enormous expense.'<sup>17</sup> In October the same year George Meredith commenced work on identifying a route between the navigable waters of the Gordon River, to its junction with the Serpentine River. Meredith did not meet the same hardships encountered by Frodsham and Innes, reporting that his route traversed easy country that could be suitably graded to meet railway requirements. However, Meredith was not prepared to recommend its adoption as he considered a better route could be found on the south side of the Gordon River.<sup>18</sup>

The three surveys did little to resolve the selection of an alternative track, road or rail route between Hobart and the West Coast. At the same time these surveys were being undertaken, the Mount Lyell Company had completed its railway into Queenstown. The line proved instrumental in opening up the country adjacent to the railway and provided a springboard for new expeditions radiating out from the Lyell

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<sup>16</sup> JPPP, Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr Surveyor Frodsham upon the Country between the Vicinity of Mount Humboldt and the Track to the West of Mount Arrowsmith via Valley of Rasselas, 1896, paper 82, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> JPPP, Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr. Surveyor Innes upon the Country between Mount Humboldt and the Head of the Navigable Water upon the River Gordon, 1896, paper 74, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> JPPP, Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr. George Campbell Meredith on the Track from the Navigable Waters of the Gordon River to its junction with the Serpentine River, 1896, paper 53.

area. Of interest to prospectors at the time was the promising mineral country located approximately ten miles to the north of Mount Lyell, in the vicinity of the Tyndall Range. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* believed that the construction of a track from Queenstown, via the Tyndall Range and on to Mount Read, would significantly assist with the development of 'what is likely to prove one of the richest parts of the West Coast.'<sup>19</sup>

Despite initial enthusiasm, the track works to the Tyndall Range did not proceed immediately. The ongoing push to secure funding to build exploration and pack-tracks encountered many obstacles. Binks contends there was little co-ordination or exchange of information between the Survey Department and the Public Works Department. Hence, pressure groups exerted sufficient political influence on the two departments so that 'tracks were not always cut as a result of established need.'<sup>20</sup> The District Surveyors lamented the mismanagement of the limited funds allocated for tracks by the Public Works Department. The newly appointed District Surveyor for Montagu, Charles Selby Wilson,<sup>21</sup> recognised the need for improved access about the Western districts. He advertised that 'I cannot too strongly urge the necessity of opening up the West Coast mineral lands by pack-tracks, and, where not practicable, by prospecting tracks.'<sup>22</sup> Wilson was appointed to the position in 1895 upon the creation of the Survey District of Montagu. He became a persistent advocate for the improvement of transport systems about his district but, unfortunately, his pleas often fell on deaf ears. The following year he regretfully reported that nothing whatsoever had been done and the spending of 'a few hundred pounds by the Government at the proper time is a mere bagatelle compared with the enormous amount of revenue following the discovery of one mine capable of supporting several thousand souls.'<sup>23</sup>

A second long-term advocate who championed the need for improved overland access to the West Coast was Bowes Kelly, Chairman of the Mount Lyell Company. During 1898 Kelly adopted a novel approach by offering a donation of £500 towards the opening up of a better track between Hobart and the West Coast. His proposal depended upon the Hobart community contributing a similar amount. The government was also invited to subscribe £1,000 towards the track.<sup>24</sup> At the time, the southern

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<sup>19</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 February 1897.

<sup>20</sup> CJ Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, Launceston, M & P Brewer, 1980, p. 237.

<sup>21</sup> The *Mercury* report of 1 September 1930 makes reference to Mr C. Selby Wilson

<sup>22</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1896, 1897, paper 48, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1898, paper 56, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 January 1898



population was smarting from the failure of the much-feted Great Western Railway to raise the necessary finance to construct a railway between Hobart and the West Coast. Kelly was well versed on railway issues as his Company owned and operated the railway between Queenstown and Strahan. He was also a founding director of the Emu Bay Railway Company, which in 1897 commenced construction of its railway through to Zeehan, with an intention of extending to Queenstown.<sup>25</sup> Kelly's offer was genuine. Despite his vested interests in the two railways, he firmly believed that a direct overland route to Mount Lyell should be established. He agitated the cause for over three decades. In this instance, Kelly was unable to cajole either the Hobart Chamber of Commerce or the government to commit to his proposal. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* considered it was fair for government to first wait and see if the Hobartians were prepared to raise the money before promising to subsidise the works.<sup>26</sup>

Counsel remained critical of the inconsistent approach taken in the cutting of exploration tracks. In his 29 December 1899 correspondence to the Minister for Lands, he outlined a number of important issues that he considered should be addressed. Counsel believed the importance of the tracks had been neither understood nor appreciated. In many instances the routes of the exploration tracks had been decided upon in a haphazard fashion and their construction executed with no fixed principle nor specifications. Counsel was adamant that skilled staff should supervise the construction of the tracks and that programs for annual track works should be completed well in advance of the new season. He considered that each main track should form the base for a systematic network of feeder tracks, the initial works to be to a standard suitable for foot traffic only. Counsel advocated that the tracks should be surveyed, to assist in their later upgrading to roads. Reports had to detail the nature of the country traversed and all constructed tracks were to be plotted on official maps at the earliest convenience.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Systematic Development of Exploration and Pack Tracks about the Lyell Area**

Counsel's long-term advocacy for a commonsense approach towards the systematic opening up of new country would be rewarded. A concerned Queenstown community had raised the matter with the Minister for Lands, Edward Mulcahy, during his visit to the town on 16 January 1900.<sup>28</sup> Two weeks later Mulcahy announced the

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<sup>25</sup> L Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 1997, pp. 81-85.

<sup>26</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 January 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, p. 237.

<sup>28</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 January 1900.

commencement of a new track program for the West Coast.<sup>29</sup> Seeking to overcome previous shortcomings in track works, the government devolved the responsibility for the implementation and supervision of the project to the Department of Lands and Surveys.<sup>30</sup> The following section outlines the extensive track construction program, both within and connecting to the Lyell area, under Counsel's systematic regime. The new works would improve overland travel and communications, breaking down the isolation barriers, and would promote exploration in the outlying districts. After the Government withdrew its funding, the Mount Lyell Company secretly undertook its own track-work and exploration, its aim to further expand and dominate mineral developments within the region.

Working within the guidelines of Counsel's directions, District Surveyor Wilson proposed the construction of a series of tracks to link the Lyell region with existing arterial pack-tracks in other areas of the West Coast. He supported cutting a track north from Mount Lyell to link with the Mount Read to Tyndall Range pack-track and the cutting of a second track, south from Birch's Inlet, on Macquarie Harbour, to Port Davey. Wilson contended that the construction of these tracks would improve access to Mount Lyell and open up the intervening land to mineral exploration. Within the Lyell region, Wilson sought to build feeder tracks between the established mining areas. This step would foster exploration within the known mineralised areas. He called for the reopening of the Howard's Plains to Argenton Track and also sought to improve access to the land between the Mount Lyell railway and the pack-track that ran along the eastern side of Mount Darwin.<sup>31</sup>

Under the new and enlightened regime, Wilson's proposals received a positive response. Major tracks were completed about the Lyell region in fairly quick succession. These included tracks to Port Davey in May 1900, from Lake Selina to Derwent Bridge in 1901, Gormanston via Eldon Bluff to Pelion Plains during 1902, from Harris' Reward to the town of Darwin, also during 1902, and from Darwin to the Franklin River, south of Frenchman's Cap, in 1903. Thomas Bather Moore, the experienced track-cutter and bushman, led the first works under the revitalised track-cutting program. Commencing at Birch's Inlet on 22 January 1900, Moore and party completed the 60 miles 37 chains track through to Port Davey by 8 May 1900. The initial assessment of the route was mixed. Evidence of mineral-bearing land was

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<sup>29</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 January 1900.

<sup>30</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, p. 24.

observed along the way but no suitable agricultural land or commercial stands of timber were encountered. During the expedition vital supplies had been stolen, which drew comment from Moore on the decline of bush ethics:

I regret to state that bush depots are not treated in the same honourable manner as in the early days of the West Coast, for, besides losing all our stores at Port Davey, a lot of petty pilfering was carried on at our main and other depots. Acts like these are far more criminal than housebreaking, because the lives of men are often dependent on the unprotected stores left behind.<sup>32</sup>

Work on the east-west link, from Lake Selina in the Tyndall Range to Derwent Bridge, commenced on 1 February 1900, amid very challenging country. Led by Robert Ewart, the party took twenty weeks to cut the twenty-miles of track between Lake Selina and Eldon Bluff. Work was severely hampered by inclement weather, particularly in the areas of high exposure, where rain, snow and fog accompanied them for weeks at a time.<sup>33</sup> Between January and April 1901, Ewart and his team extended the track from Eldon Bluff to Derwent Bridge, near Lake St Clair. The majority of the twenty-seven mile and sixty chain track covered fairly level country, broken by several heavy grades. Ewart noted small veins of coal at Coal Hill but saw no other indications of minerals. The total distance between Derwent Bridge and Lake Selina measured forty-seven and a half miles.<sup>34</sup> The length was subsequently reduced after Counsel inspected the route and requested Ewart to effect a deviation near the twelve mile peg. Upon completion, Counsel commented that it was 'an infinitely better track, and is 3 miles shorter.'<sup>35</sup>

In January 1902 Ewart commenced a second track, in a south to north direction, between Mount Lyell and Pelion Plains. The route intersected the Lake Selina to Derwent Bridge track at the nineteen mile point, and linked with the Mole Creek to Rosebery overland track, cut by Edward George Innes in 1897/98.<sup>36</sup> The latter track was used by prospectors and packers travelling between the northern farming districts and the West Coast mining towns of Tullah, Rosebery and beyond. Ewart's new route promised to provide a more direct overland path for those making their way between

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<sup>31</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, pp. 52-53.

<sup>34</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, pp. 45-46

<sup>35</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> JPPP, Route to West Coast: Report by Mr. Surveyor Innes upon the track from Mole Creek to Rosebery, Mount Reid, 1897, paper 43, pp. 3-11.

Mount Lyell and northern Tasmania. Work on the thirty-six mile and forty-six chain track were completed in May 1902. The route traversed much high country, opening up an extensive belt of land to prospectors coming from Zeehan, Gormanston, Hobart and Deloraine.<sup>37</sup>

Ewart also commented on bush ethics, noting the 'wanton destruction of native animals by hunters during the close season. Kangaroo, wallaby, and badger are slaughtered wholesale for the sake of procuring the skins, and unless stricter supervision is exercised the animals mentioned will be exterminated in this portion of the State.'<sup>38</sup> The lack of game along the tracks was of considerable concern to prospectors who could spend at least a quarter of their time packing provisions if unable to replenish stocks along the way by shooting animals.<sup>39</sup> The diet of the bushman was not restricted to animals. Birds were also eagerly sought, a traveller on the Linda Track reporting: 'the only game about consisted of numbers of parrots and jays...we had jay soup that night, a luxury to which we did full justice.'<sup>40</sup>

Two short pack tracks were completed close to Mount Lyell during 1902. The first commenced at the town of Darwin, located on the North Mount Lyell Company's railway, and linked with the mineral sections scattered along the eastern face of Mount Darwin. The second track provided a shortened access to the nearby Mount Jukes mining district and saved packers from making the arduous slog from the western end of the King River Gorge. The new route began midway through the gorge, near the confluence of the King and Queen Rivers, and was facilitated by the construction of a substantial bridge over the King River near Harris' Reward mine.<sup>41</sup>

Darwin would prove a popular starting point for track cutters, with Thomas Bather Moore setting out in January 1903 in a south-easterly direction towards the Franklin River, to the south of the Frenchman's Cap. The expedition aimed to open up the land near the Frenchman's Cap and to link with the track cut by his brother, James Moore, in 1900, that ran south-westerly from the Linda Track to the Jane River. After Moore reached the Franklin River, he followed it downstream through rough country. He was recalled in May due to the lateness of the season, after cutting seventeen miles and thirty-four chains of track. Moore reported finding promising mineral country and a good stand of King William pine on tributaries of the Franklin River.<sup>42</sup> Moore was not

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<sup>37</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, pp. 14 & 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1910-11, 1911, paper 17, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 September 1900.

<sup>41</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1902-3, 1903, paper 31, p. 10.

requested to return and complete the task. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* subsequently condemned government for its lack of enterprise, stating the highly promising country to the north-east of the Frenchman's Cap would 'remain neglected until desperate determination shall hazard a trial at it.'<sup>43</sup>

Apart from a commitment to develop exploration and packing tracks about the Lyell region, District Surveyor Charles Selby Wilson sought to improve overland stock routes into mining towns. The much-maligned Linda Track, which is discussed at length later in this chapter, was the main access for stock from the Central Highlands districts. When herding the cattle over the track around 1900, drover John Best considered it to be extremely difficult and he required several good dogs to assist progress. In reasonable weather the journey generally took Best five days from Ouse to Queenstown. In poor weather it could take twelve days.<sup>44</sup> Cattle coming from the North West Coast, via the existing northern route to Rosebery, would take six days, while stock from the Deloraine area, under favourable circumstances, could take eight to ten days. These times were considered far too long for cattle to be on the road without proper feed. Wilson expected that the opening up of a cattle track between Rosebery and Queenstown would lower the droving time from the North West Coast to between two and three days.<sup>45</sup> It was anticipated that Ewart's 1902 track, linking Gormanston (King River) to Innes's Mole Creek to Rosebery stock route, would also provide a stock path in summer months upon the completion of some upgrading work.<sup>46</sup> The majority of cattle bound for Zeehan and Dundas were herded from the Circular Head region, via the beaches along the western coastline to the Pieman River, and then inland to the silverfields.<sup>47</sup>

By August 1902 Counsel's systematic plan to construct a network of tracks into previously uninhabited regions was completed. The total distance of the tracks cut and marked under his program was 424 miles, at a total cost of £3,515, or £8 5s. per mile. The project proved expensive, mainly due to the time and large labour force required to pack supplies for track-cutting teams. Counsel argued that the expenditure would be offset by the useful geological and general information collected during the work. He now believed 'the cause of complaint of the dilatoriness of the Government in affording

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<sup>43</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 June 1903.

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>45</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> T Jetson, *It's a Different Country Down There – A History of Droving in Western Tasmania*, Smithton, Circular Head Bicentenary Project Team, 2004, p. 31.

access is removed... the main exploration tracks through the unexplored parts of the Island are now cut, and those required in the future should neither be so costly per mile or anything like such difficult undertakings.’<sup>48</sup>

The completion of Counsel’s track program marked the demise of the pioneering prospector. In June 1903 the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* observed ‘our prospectors of to-day are not possessed of the grit of those of the good old times.’<sup>49</sup> A year later, with new exploration at a standstill, the *Herald* bemoaned the changing attitudes within society. The paper observed that prospectors now liked ‘to find gold in their own backyards, so to speak, oblivious of the natural law that nothing comes to the empty handed man in this world unless he is prepared to dig some distance for it...we seem to live in an effeminate age, when courage is small, faith absent, and initiative non-existent.’<sup>50</sup>

In his 1903 Annual Report, Wilson concurred with the *Herald’s* general sentiments. He noted that within his survey district of Montagu, which included the Mount Lyell area, no new mining fields had been discovered primarily because of the absence of prospectors and a decreasing interest in the type of work. Wilson believed that, because of Counsel’s track-cutting regime, no part of the West Coast was now out of the reach of the prospector. He considered there were still opportunities to make important discoveries and it was only a matter of searching within the known fields. Nevertheless, the halcyon days of discovery had disappeared. Wilson lamented that: ‘It is much to be deplored that “pioneer prospecting,” which was conducted so energetically and with so much enthusiasm by those engaged in the work some years ago, has now become to all intents a thing of the past.’<sup>51</sup>

The early West Coast prospector was considered a tough breed of man, one that could endure absolute hardships, physical and mental, who was prepared to spend long periods of time in an inhospitable wilderness. The breaking of the isolation and physical barriers by constructing tracks, roads, tramways and railways, within the Lyell region, progressively diminished the pioneering spirit. With the broad network of exploration tracks established, the mineral fields roughly defined, the next phase was to confirm the earlier discoveries, upgrade the transport infrastructure and develop ‘the complex pattern of settlement.’<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 June 1903.

<sup>50</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 September 1904.

<sup>51</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year 1903, 1904, paper 26, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania’s West Coast*, p. 39.

Believing it had provided the necessary foundations to support ongoing exploration within the established mineral districts, the government largely withdrew from funding any further large-scale track programs on the West Coast. Taking on the mantle, and hoping to capitalise on its already successful mining and processing operations, the Mount Lyell Company embarked on its own exploration program, albeit in a very discreet and covert way. In December 1904 the Company employed recognised track cutter and explorer, Thomas Bather Moore, to prospect for minerals within the vicinity of the upper reaches of the Gordon River and along the Franklin River. Not wishing to attract undue attention and speculation as to the nature of his enterprise, the Company, as a condition of employment, required that Moore carry out the expedition in his own name. He was directed not to divulge any details of the Company's involvement to the members of his party or to the public. In a cloak and dagger operation, all correspondence to and from Moore was passed onto his wife who then redirected it as appropriate to either her husband or to Robert Sticht. All mineral samples were delivered in Moore's name to the stationmaster at Regatta Point for delivery to the Company's Assay Office in Queenstown.<sup>53</sup>

During his time in the bush Moore followed existing Government tracks and, where necessary, blazed new paths in his quest for minerals. His initial trip met with minor success, locating iron pyrites and a large outcrop of gossan in a tributary of the Gordon River.<sup>54</sup> Over the ensuing years Moore carried out a series of expeditions on behalf of the Company, without openly disclosing his sponsor. During 1905 he was credited with taking up ground 'in the vicinity of "Dora" and "Red Hills" for a strong syndicate that is likely to test these properties.'<sup>55</sup> Moore made a sortie along the southern coast in 1907,<sup>56</sup> and was more than likely to have been involved with the Mount Lyell Company's unsuccessful prospecting efforts about the Norfolk Range, the Frankland and Heazleton Rivers, and at Balfour.<sup>57</sup> Despite enduring great hardships and exhibiting the best of endeavours, Moore's hard work met with minimal success. On 1

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<sup>53</sup> R Sticht letter to TB Moore, 29 December 1904, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, File 5/2/2, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>54</sup> TB Moore letter to R Sticht, 15 February 1905, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, File 5/2/2, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>55</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the Year Ending December 31, 1905, 1906, paper 11, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 11 June 1907, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, File 5/2/3, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>57</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement for the Minister for Mines, 1910, 1910, paper 7, p. 6.

November 1912 a reluctant Robert Sticht terminated Moore's employment at the direction of the Mount Lyell Board.<sup>58</sup>

Apart from Moore's secretive sorties, the era for exploration tracks within the immediate Lyell region had virtually ended. Wilson surmised the existing comprehensive network of pack-tracks would facilitate preliminary mining operations and enable surface works to commence. He considered that, as the exploitation of the minerals expanded within the district, the pack-tracks would be replaced by privately constructed wooden tramways which, in turn, would be eventually superseded by Government-built light railways.<sup>59</sup> Wilson also observed that since the amalgamation of the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Companies in 1903 there had been comparatively little methodical exploration in the district. In particular, in the country to the south of Mount Lyell, around Mounts Darwin and Jukes, prospecting had been both haphazard and spasmodic. He considered it 'difficult to discover a cogent reason for the apparent neglect of this district, seeing that the North Lyell railway passes right through it, giving it an accessibility as regards transport facilities not surpassed by that of any other portion of the West Coast mineral belt.'<sup>60</sup>

About Mount Lyell, in areas unsuited to roads or tramways, a number of walking tracks were developed to assist foot traffic between the mines and the residential areas. During 1907 the rough track connecting Linda and the Lyell Comstock mine, located in the Sedgwick Valley, was deviated around the western escarpment of Mount Lyell with an aim of providing a tolerable means of access.<sup>61</sup> The following year a pack-track was opened up to provide a roundabout link between Zeehan and Queenstown. Commencing near the Mariposa tramway, to the east of Zeehan, the track extended around the southern spurs of Mount Dundas and on to Mount Sedgwick.<sup>62</sup> Sixteen miles in length, the six feet wide pack-track followed the original Great Western Railway route for some miles, traversing favourable mineral country and providing access to fine belts of gum and manuka near Mount Sedgwick.<sup>63</sup> The Mount Lyell Company had some years earlier extended the Queen River tram from its smelters to

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<sup>58</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 November 1912, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, File 5/1/3, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>59</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year ended 30 June 1908, 1908, paper 13, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1908-9, paper 21, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 August 1907.

<sup>62</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year ended 30 June 1908, 1908, paper 13, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 March 1908.



access the timber stands near Mount Sedgwick.<sup>64</sup> Counsel's plan to open up the Mount Lyell region through a program of building exploration and pack-tracks had been delivered, but there was overall disappointment for all concerned that the project did not actually deliver any new mineral discoveries.

### **New Tracks – A Change in Emphasis**

The following section examines the changing emphasis from building a network of tracks to facilitate regional exploration and packing activities to one of improving communications between established towns, targeting specific districts for intense exploration and catering to the needs of the growing tourism and recreational market. In 1908 the government initiated exploration of land along the defunct Great Western Railway route, between Glenora and Mount Lyell. It was hoped that minerals could be found near the old survey alignment, to rekindle plans to build the railway. Parliament appropriated £2,000 on 5 December 1907 to finance the investigation. Reports were sought on the agricultural, timber and mineral values of the land. A description of the scenery and the identification of possible tourist developments within the region was also requested.<sup>65</sup>

Four track-cutting parties were formed. Edward Innes was dispatched to report on the land near the Linda Track and to the West of the Prince of Wales Range. James Moore was sent to investigate the Tyenna to Gell River district, Robert Thirkell the country between Mount Arrowsmith and the Gordon River and Robert Marriott the land about the Gordon River and Florentine Valley. William Twelvetrees, the Government Geologist, and L Keith Ward, the Assistant Government Geologist, were instructed to carry out geological assessments along the railway route in conjunction with the exploration program. Poor weather conditions, flooded rivers, thick vegetation and rough terrain created considerable hardships for the parties. Counsel was unimpressed with the agricultural worth of the country, although he observed some good stands of timber. Thirkell's party found traces of copper and iron near Frenchman's Cap and gold in four places. Stands of Huon pine were noted growing along the Jane River.

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<sup>64</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 March 1908.

<sup>65</sup> The Department of Lands and Surveys Report for the Year ending 30 June 1908, makes reference to 'The Exploration Act 1907' whereas the legislation is indexed as Appropriation for Exploration, 7 Ed. VII. No. 38, its introduction citing 'AN ACT to appropriate certain sums arising from the Consolidated Revenue for Exploring certain Country, and for other purposes.'

Unfortunately, the preliminary reports provided by the two geologists failed to encourage potential prospectors.<sup>66</sup>

In his 30 June 1909 report, Twelvetrees was unable to identify any new economic mineral deposits along the proposed railway route. He concluded that there was little likelihood the country would develop into a mining field of any importance and anticipated only sporadic occurrences of ore would be found. Twelvetrees acknowledged that the existing overland route via Ouse and the Linda Track provided superior access to the West Coast than the Gordon route. He conceded that 'if, however, the object is to tap the scenic beauties of the Gordon River and its vicinity, the track followed this year has the advantage, always provided that a track is made to meet it north of the Gordon, and proper communication [is] established with Macquarie Harbour.'<sup>67</sup> In his 19 June 1909 report, Ward was equally unimpressed with the agricultural and mineral wealth of the area. He identified the most likely asset in the region to be the stands of Huon pine located along the Jane River. On tourism opportunities, Ward commented that, 'while the scenery to be viewed from the high country will compare very favourably with that to be seen in other portions of Tasmania, the difficulties of access will prevent tourists from reaching the necessary points of vantage. There is but little game in the district, and certainly not enough to attract sportsmen.'<sup>68</sup>

Closer to Mount Lyell, there was a push to improve communications between towns. The Mariposa to Mount Sedgwick track provided an indirect route between Queenstown and Zeehan. The first serious attempt to blaze an easier, all-weather pack-track was made in March 1910 by F Kershaw and J Kirkwood.<sup>69</sup> Both the Zeehan and Queenstown Councils supported the need for a cheaper means of communication between the two principal mining centres. It was envisaged that constructing the horse track would benefit 'butchers, stock drivers, travellers, prospectors, and others'.<sup>70</sup> The government was receptive to the proposal and in early 1911 works were to commence from both ends. It was anticipated the track would develop into one of the most important lines of communication on the West Coast. The *Herald* criticised the tracks

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<sup>66</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year ended 30 June 1908, 1908, paper 13, pp. 9 & 21-39.

<sup>67</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1908-9, 1909, paper 21, p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1908-9, 1909, paper 21, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 March 1910.

<sup>70</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 August 1910.

previously built within the region and now expected 'something beyond the usually haphazard and crude way of setting to work in track construction should be applied.'<sup>71</sup>

The track traversed difficult country and cost approximately £1,500, well above the £1,000 originally voted for the works.<sup>72</sup> Built by day labour in just over six months, under the supervision of the Government Inspector of Roads, Robert Grubb, the twenty-one mile and thirteen chain track ran from near the Zeehan abattoirs through to the Strahan to Queenstown road, three miles from Queenstown. The track traversed button grass plains and heavily timbered country and crossed a number of steep ridges. Several deep gorges were negotiated along the way. Some sixty bridges and culverts were built, the largest being the 144 feet long Celery pine bridge over the Henty River.<sup>73</sup> Subsequent heavy use of the track led to increased pressure for it to be upgraded to a cart road. Recognising that tracks now served as a precursor to more permanent occupation on the West Coast, the Government viewed the construction and proper maintenance of the pack-tracks to be 'an essential means for hastening the progress of development.'<sup>74</sup> With much of the broad acre mineral land already explored and subjected to geological examination, the emphasis for building tracks had switched to providing improved lines of communication. Favourably graded alignments were preferred, in recognition that the track may need to be upgraded to a tramway or road some time in the future.<sup>75</sup>

It was now apparent that more knowledge of the terrain to be traversed was required. Discovering minerals was no longer the sole driving force behind developing tracks to and within the western region. The government had directed its geologists and surveyors to report on the potential for agricultural development, the availability of timber resources, and to identify scenic values and comment on the likelihood of establishing tourist resorts within the region.<sup>76</sup> While government had a broader responsibility to open up the land, local government had become liable for the burden of maintaining the existing infrastructure, including the roads and tracks within the municipalities. Because of the disproportionately low rates bases and the high capital costs involved, the councils on the West Coast were unable to afford the essential repairs required to maintain the assets. Making a fact finding mission to the West Coast in October 1910, politicians witnessed first hand the disadvantages and extra costs

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<sup>71</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 January 1911.

<sup>72</sup> JPPP, Engineer-in-Chief: Report for 1910-11, 1911, paper 25, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 August 1911.

<sup>74</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1909-10, 1910, paper 22, page 23.

<sup>75</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1914-15, 1915, paper 22, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1908, 1909, paper 22, p. 23.

brought on by isolation and other demographic issues. This led to the promise that the western mining districts would receive a more equitable share of municipal grants.<sup>77</sup>

The responsibility for constructing tracks varied. Local government now played a greater role in the supervision and construction, while the works were financed by government grants. The North Lyell to Linda pack track was built on this basis.<sup>78</sup> The Mount Lyell Company played a role in keeping the lines of communication open and in the case of the North Lyell to Lyell Comstock track, the Company contributed £440 1s.0d. and the Government £250 towards the works.<sup>79</sup> Track maintenance was expensive because of the many inherent geographical cost factors. The shortage of natural bush feed for packhorses was a problem. Prospectors became disheartened with the lack of effort spent replenishing provisions for both man and animal. William Wallace, Secretary for Mines, recommended that small areas could be burnt during summer and laid down in grass seed to provide prospectors more reliable horse feed.<sup>80</sup> Wilson agreed with Wallace. He considered that the burning off and sowing of grass would aid track clearance and provide grazing areas for horses and stock.<sup>81</sup>

The growing recognition of the West Coast as a potential tourist destination was accentuated with the formation of the West Coast Tourist Association in November 1907, and the Mount Lyell Tourist Association in May the following year.<sup>82</sup> The former Association, in its 1908 publication on the West Coast, described the country having 'majestic mountains, rocky gorges, luxuriant fern gullies, magnificent rivers, pretty lakes and interesting button grass plains...communion with Nature in all her pristine beauty may be had without effort.'<sup>83</sup> The need to promote the tourist opportunities within the region was opportune as figures showed the West Coast captured only 2.5 per cent of tourists visiting Tasmania, although the Union Steam Ship Company had been actively involved in arranging visits for tourists to the Gordon River.<sup>84</sup> The publication emphasised that access into the region could be gained by rail, tramway and boat. Tourist tracks and accommodation were provided in the Mount Dundas and Moore's Pimple area. The description of the Linda Track was far more circumspect, being 'an

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<sup>77</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1910-11, 1911, paper 17, p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> R Murray letter to R Sticht, 26 July 1912, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer in Charge to the General Manager, Non State Records (NS) 1711/253, p. 613, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>79</sup> B Sawyer letter to Engineer-in-Chief, Public Works Department, 3 July 1919, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/678, AOT.

<sup>80</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1907, 1908, paper 2. p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year Ended 30 June 1908, 1908, paper 13, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 May 1908.

<sup>83</sup> HW Judd, *Pictorial Guide to the West Coast of Tasmania*, Facsimile of 1908 edition, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1976, p. 25.

interesting trip, but rather too arduous for the average tourist.’<sup>85</sup> A primary objective of the newly-formed Mount Lyell Tourist Association was to ‘endeavor to enhance the value of a trip to Queenstown by getting the country opened up by tracks.’<sup>86</sup> Over ensuing years the Association proved particularly active. It sought financial assistance from both the Mount Lyell Company and the government to build tracks and develop a playground in the King River Gorge. Its 1910 proposal was designed to enable ‘parents to spend a few hours with their children on the green sward, or a ramble along the shady tracks into the beautiful natural forest.’<sup>87</sup>

Before the massive pollution of the King River, the King River Gorge area immediately below the Abt railway line was very popular with tourists, with an estimated 1500 people visiting a year. Further tracks were re-cut in 1917, including the path first cut in 1882 by Con Lynch from the picnic ground, up Sailor Jack’s Creek, to Rinadeena. A track was blazed a short way into the gorge, although it was ‘not recommended to persons at either extremity of life: it was made for boys, flappers, and others of blameless conversation who have reason to be assured of their destiny in the hereafter.’<sup>88</sup> Around the gorge, and towards Dubbil Barril, tracks and picnic spots were established. A whole day could be spent visiting them all.<sup>89</sup> The Mount Lyell Tourist Association was instrumental in having a new track cut to Flannagan’s Flat. The track provided good access to the Garfield River, where sports fishermen could catch good-sized mountain trout.<sup>90</sup> The four mile thirteen chain track was cut in 1913 and partly followed the old route between Harris’ Reward and Darwin.<sup>91</sup>

Although most of the mineral areas had been opened by 1912, the government continued to search for new mineral and agricultural land about the West Coast. Of particular interest was the country between the King River and Mount Darwin and the Macquarie Harbour to Port Davey area. Financial assistance to open up these areas was offered as an incentive to private prospecting parties.<sup>92</sup> Work commenced in 1914 on the track from Double Cove, on Macquarie Harbour, via Point Hibbs towards Port Davey. The track would double as an access for rescue work in the event of shipwrecks

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<sup>84</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 May 1908.

<sup>85</sup> Judd, *Pictorial Guide to the West Coast of Tasmania*, p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 May 1908.

<sup>87</sup> T Wise, Secretary Mount Lyell Tourist Association, letter to R Sticht, 11 January 1910, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/325, pp. 631-633, AOT.

<sup>88</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 March 1917.

<sup>89</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 May 1919.

<sup>90</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 August 1912.

<sup>91</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 March 1913.

<sup>92</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Mines 1912, 1912, paper 6, pp. 28-29.

further down the western coastline.<sup>93</sup> An optimistic Wilson envisaged the new track would provide an opportunity for the government to attract immigrants from the western islands of Scotland to settle in adaptable areas along the coastline, and establish a fishing industry. When the weather was too rough to fish, the settlers could tend their land. Wilson considered their 'condition of life would certainly be a thousand times better than those prevailing on the west of Scotland.'<sup>94</sup>

Despite the best of intentions, and government's desire to establish new settlements, mineral exploration waned on the West Coast during World War 1. Interest in the area marginally brightened in 1918 with the discovery of osmiridium in the largely unexplored land to the north of the Pieman River, between the Wilson River and the Meredith Range. A network of exploration tracks assisted prospectors search for the highly valued mineral.<sup>95</sup> Some of the early tracks in the Mount Lyell region were reopened to facilitate the increased demand for grazing land in the district. Much of the promising land could be accessed via the old tramways, timber haulage tracks and pack-tracks that had been built during the preceding twenty-five years, saving considerable expenditure on new roads and bridges.<sup>96</sup>

By 1922 the government had virtually withdrawn from track-cutting activities. The emphasis had changed from exploration to providing access to 'lands already selected by private enterprise rather than stretching out into new fields in advance of settlement.'<sup>97</sup> The following year the Department of Lands and Surveys reported that it had carried out very little in the way of cutting exploration tracks. The long battle for funding waged by District Surveyor Wilson came to an end. Most of the vast miles of tracks forged within the West Coast wilderness under the various track-cutting regimes had reverted to wilderness. More modern forms of transport had replaced the reliance on tracks for the conveying people and freight over long distances. In 1923 Wilson reported that 'there is no land in this district other than what has already been reported upon.'<sup>98</sup>

### **The Linda Track - Derwent Bridge to Gormanston**

For nearly forty years the Linda Track provided the main overland link between Derwent Bridge and the Lyell region. The following section outlines the history of its

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<sup>93</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1914, 1914, paper 25, p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1913-14, 1914, paper 14, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1917-18, 1918, paper 34, pp. 4 & 14.

<sup>96</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1918-19, 1919, paper 34, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1921-22, 1922, paper 24, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the year 1922-23, 1923, paper 37, p. 15.

development, its ongoing importance as a means of reducing isolation and its eventual demise through the improvements made to other forms of transport. The track was originally cut by Thomas Bather Moore in 1883, and upgraded in 1887. During the early years of exploration on the West Coast, the track provided an alternative access for those unwilling to endure the sea trip. As settlement developed about Mount Lyell, the track was at times when the shipping services were affected by adverse weather conditions. The overland telegraph to Hobart followed the same route. Reliance on the track had declined with the gradual upgrading of shipping services into Strahan through the early 1890s and again with the establishment of the railway into Queenstown in 1896. Despite increased competition, the Linda Track was still patronised, particularly by stockmen who drove their sheep and cattle from the Central Highland and Midlands farming districts to Mount Lyell.<sup>99</sup>

As the nature of exploration and settlement changed on the West Coast so too did the occupations of those travelling the fifty-one mile long Linda Track. By September 1900 its chief wayfarers included 'the packer, the drover, the line man, the road man, and the dead-beat.'<sup>100</sup> Although fully upgraded to a pack track standard by 1897, its standard of construction fell a long way short of permitting drays and buggies to use the route. From Derwent Bridge it took a two hour horse ride across the predominantly flat plains to the Iron Store, that was located on Burns' Plains, at the foot of Mount King William I, east of Mount Arrowsmith. Open and exposed to the weather conditions, the path ranged from firm to boggy, with some extremely slippery corduroy sections along this section. From the Iron Store, the track climbed over the extremely exposed "bald face" of Mount Arrowsmith, its elevation then recorded at 3,400.<sup>101</sup>

From the summit, the route descended 1,750 feet over the next two and a half miles, into the shelter of the Franklin River Valley. After crossing the bridge over the Franklin, the route continued up hill and down dale until the suspension bridge at the Collingwood River was reached. Located on the western banks of the river was the Wooden Store, the total distance between the two huts being nineteen miles. The section of track between the two bridges was described as not half bad, the travelling

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<sup>99</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 October 1896.

<sup>100</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 September 1900.

<sup>101</sup> The current Department of Primary Industries Water and Environment 1:25,000 maps, Arrowsmith 4232, shows Mount Arrowsmith to have a height of 981 metres or 3,218 feet.

reaching a sharp walking pace. Continuing in a westerly direction, the track entered the Victoria Pass, and what was known as 'Nine-Mile Forest.'<sup>102</sup>

This section of track was generally fairly sheltered but was not suitable for riding, the corduroy sections being often broken and dangerous for the horses. Where the track kept to the hillside it became treacherous and boggy. Eleven miles on from the Wooden Hut, the Nelson River was crossed, after which the track often became a quagmire along the section towards the Princess River. From here travellers could often hear the reverberating boom from the shots at the Iron Blow. Civilisation was only five to six miles away. On crossing the bridge at the King River, the track improved briefly to road standard, although the final one mile slog up to Gormanston followed a trench, filled with two feet of water. The distance from the Wooden Hut to Gormanston was twenty three miles. The total overland distance from Hobart to Gormanston, was 160 miles.<sup>103</sup>

Accommodation along the route was essential for travellers. A third hut was built sometime prior to 1908 and became popularly known as the Cockatoo Hut. Strategically located between the two existing huts, the building provided a valuable resting-place for those about to make the difficult climb up and over the exposed face of Mount Arrowsmith. The log hut was sited on the northern banks of the Franklin River, on the southern side of Artist's Hill. The hut at the Collingwood River had been originally timber clad but was later rebuilt with iron. It was a substantial structure, having one large room, lined by benches that also served as bunks. All three huts had separate stables for the horses. In early times the government provided supplies for the huts, but its generosity ceased following ongoing abuse of the food supplies. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* claimed 'it was not the packers, nor the drovers, nor the road men who wasted the food or stole it, but the sin lay with the typical overlander, who never thinks of the morrow nor of those who come after him.'<sup>104</sup>

Given the difficult nature of the terrain, it was not surprising the Linda Track received much criticism. Travelling was easier in the drier summer months but not so during wetter times. The *Herald* claimed that it was not 'a track calculated to produce poetry in the mind of the passerby, be he on foot or on horse, but it widens one's imagination and tends to abnormally increase one's vocabulary. Ordinary cuss words

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<sup>102</sup> The Nine-Mile Forest was also referred to as "The Ten-Mile Forest" in some articles, and according to the 6 September 1900 *Mount Lyell Standard*, Mr F Gaffney had erected a pine hut here for his drovers.

<sup>103</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 April 1897.

<sup>104</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 September 1900.



seem stale when used on the overland.'<sup>105</sup> The section over Mount Arrowsmith was extremely dangerous, causing the *Herald* to call for the erection of snow poles between the Iron Store and the summit, to help prevent the loss of life. The paper considered this part of the route to be 'a menace to the lives of travellers in rigorous weather.'<sup>106</sup>

Reliance on the Linda Track for droving stock dropped with the railway connection from the North West Coast on 21 December 1900. Stock could be railed over the Emu Bay Railway to Zeehan, then by government line to Strahan and, finally by the Mount Lyell Company's railway to Queenstown. Rail freight was costly but far less debilitating for the livestock. The gradual development of farming land in the Strahan, Lynchford and King River Valley areas lessened the need for the stock routes. As use of the Linda Track declined, so too did the condition of the track and huts. Trappers stabling their horses inside the huts contributed to the damage.<sup>107</sup> Flooding proved a major problem for the bridges along the track. The May 1908 floods destroyed nine structures between the Princess and Collingwood Rivers.<sup>108</sup> The rebuilt suspension bridge over the Collingwood River was considered to be a masterpiece of ingenuity. Its main cables were 275 feet in length and the bridge 250 feet long and 6 feet 6 inches wide.<sup>109</sup> Although less frequently used, the track was still the most practicable means of overland access to the West Coast. It remained popular with the miners making their way to and from the western fields.<sup>110</sup>

Through 1910 the high cost of maintenance became a major concern. The Collingwood River bridge has again fallen into disrepair within a little over a year. Assistance was sought from the Federal Government as the most frequent users were Commonwealth telegraph repair linesmen and private parties bringing horses to the West Coast who wished to 'avoid the danger and expense incurred in having them brought by rail.'<sup>111</sup> Refusing to contribute, the Commonwealth threatened to let the overland wire to Hobart fall into disuse. Alternative lines connecting with the North West Coast could be used to transact the West Coast business. Unable to off-load the responsibility for the maintenance of the Linda Track to either Federal or Local

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<sup>105</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 September 1900.

<sup>106</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 September 1900.

<sup>107</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 July 1906.

<sup>108</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 May 1908.

<sup>109</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 December 1908.

<sup>110</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year ended 30 June 1908, 1908, paper 13, p. 38.

<sup>111</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 February 1910.

Government, the State Government accepted that it was still necessary to keep it open for public safety reasons.<sup>112</sup>

Ongoing track maintenance works continued but only to the extent that by 1917 the trip could only be negotiated when the rivers were not in flood.<sup>113</sup> A year later the neglect of the track was apparent. The route was overgrown and was only recognisable by the remaining upright telegraph poles.<sup>114</sup> The bridge over the Collingwood River was reportedly hanging by a single rope. In February 1918 Charles Whitham, the Secretary of the Mount Lyell Tourist Association, wrote to the Tasmanian Treasurer, Sir Neil Lewis, advising him that the sole east to west route to the West Coast was so overgrown and obstructed that it practically ceased to exist. Whitham urged Lewis to consider upgrading the track to a motor road standard between Derwent Bridge and Gormanston. The proposed road had the advantage of passing close to Lake St Clair, a destination Whitham considered should be developed as the State's principal tourist resort.<sup>115</sup> Lewis did not act upon Whitham's request. In March 1919 the Premier, Walter Lee, visited Queenstown. He was approached for funds to repair the Linda Track to which he responded 'we have expended money on tracks, and found it thrown away.'<sup>116</sup>

Whitham's suggestion to upgrade the Linda Track was opportunistic. It followed widespread concern that the West Coast was still very much isolated from the rest of Tasmania, physically, recreationally and commercially. Travel to Melbourne was far more expedient than the slow and costly rail trip to Hobart. Holidays were spent in Victoria in preference to Tasmania and much West Coast business was transacted in Melbourne. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, investigating the potential for a road to the West Coast, concurred there were reasons for applying the "Lost Province" tag to the region. It considered 'the existing means of communication are such that trade relations and general intercourse between the West Coast and the rest of the State are of a very limited nature.'<sup>117</sup> The Committee recommended that £70,000 be appropriated to build a road between Lake St Clair and Gormanston.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Mines 1913, paper 15, p. 12.

<sup>113</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 June 1917.

<sup>114</sup> The *Zeehan & Dundas Herald* of 10 April 1918 reported the original telegraph line that ran to the West Coast via the Linda Track had been dismantled and replaced in later years by a new line from Burnie.

<sup>115</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 March 1918.

<sup>116</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

<sup>117</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal, 1920, paper 12, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: General Report for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1919, to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1920, 1920, paper 31, pp. 2 & 5.

## The Road Connection between Strahan and Mount Lyell

The dray road between Strahan and Lynchford was essential in the development of the early Mount Lyell field. The subsequent off-shoot to Howard's Plains would be even more important as it was to become the main road for traffic between Strahan and Queenstown. This section looks at the evolution of road communication with Strahan and briefly examines the problems encountered with the first road on the West Coast, that between Trial Harbour and Zeehan.

Early road building on the West Coast was fraught with difficulties from the start. The combination of rough terrain, dense vegetation and inclement weather conditions had presented many engineering challenges, making road construction expensive to build and maintain. The progression from tracks to macadamised roads<sup>119</sup> was trialled and had failed. The futility of building makeshift roads on the West Coast was demonstrated by the construction of the thirteen-mile road between Trial Harbour (also known as Remine) and Zeehan in 1888.<sup>120</sup> Needless cost-cutting occurred. The resulting steep grades reduced the carrying capacities of the teams working the route. The light loadings were inefficient, inconvenient to travellers and led to higher freight charges. The initial savings were a false economy as the increased operating costs were ultimately borne by industry and the settlers in the district.<sup>121</sup> As with all early roads on the West Coast, wet weather and overuse combined to make the Trial Harbour Road a quagmire, causing accidents to horses and creating excessive wear and tear on the carts. Cartage costs rose to nearly £5 pounds per ton.<sup>122</sup>

Over the next forty years roads were to have very little impact on the West Coast, with Charles Whitham commenting in 1923:

You might say that there are no roads in Western Tasmania, and you would not be far wrong. There is one from Waratah going 19 miles towards the Pieman, serving the Whyte River and osmiridium fields; others connect Williamsford and Rosebery, Zeehan and Dundas, Lynchford and Gormanston, Strahan and the Ocean Beach; but none of these exceeds 7 miles in length. There is an old road from Zeehan to Trial Bay and Heemskirk, and another from Strahan to Lyell; but the first is rarely used, and is in bad repair, while the second is overgrown with scrub and blocked by fallen trees and slips. Tramways and railroads have been found to be more suitable to local conditions than roads.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> The macadamised road was a successful road construction method advanced by John McAdam (1756-1836) that utilised layers of crushed angular rock that was compacted to form a lasting hard durable surface for road traffic. Newitt, *Convicts & Carriageways*, p. 8.

<sup>120</sup> JPPP, Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, (Including Reports of Engineer of Roads and Government Architect), 1888, paper 45, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines, for 1889-90: Including Inspector of Mines' Report, 1890, paper 64, p. 11.

<sup>122</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 April 1891.

<sup>123</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania*, Queenstown, p. 62.

The Lyell region proved far more difficult for road construction than the undulating coastal plains between Trial Harbour and Zeehan. In 1893 access between Strahan and Mount Lyell comprised a serviceable cart-road for the first twenty-three miles to Lynchford. On passing through the Lynch's Creek gold workings, to the east of Lynchford, the seven mile track to the Iron Blow traversed the steep foothills around Mount Owen. Traffic over this section was restricted to horse-drawn sledges.<sup>124</sup> A second road was built to service the Howard's Plains gold diggings. Commencing at the fifteen-mile peg on the road between Strahan and Lynch's Creek, it was upgraded from a pack-track to cart track standard in 1889.<sup>125</sup> At the time, neither road was built to a sufficient standard to carry the heavy construction traffic bound for the Mount Lyell Company's new smelter site in the Queen River Valley. Understandably, the government was reticent to spend further money on either route as it anticipated the Company's railway, on completion, would resolve the existing problems of inaccessibility to the area.<sup>126</sup>

Unfortunately for the Mount Lyell Company, it was unable to delay its construction works until after the completion of its railway. An evaluation of the temporary road access options saw the Company decide against using the dray road, via Lynch's Creek to the Gormanston Gap, as it was unsuited to heavy traffic and was neither straight nor level.<sup>127</sup> Instead, the Company decided to extend the Howard's Plains Road to the proposed smelter site, then continue it up around the southern foothills of Mount Lyell, to the Gormanston Gap. From "The Gap," the northerly track linked to the Iron Blow mine and the easterly route led to the new township site chosen for Gormanston, and on to the Linda Valley. The length of the section between the Queen River and the Iron Blow was approximately three miles.<sup>128</sup>

At this early stage the Company commenced its role as a benefactor to the region. Anxious to generate a cash flow through the sale of its ore, the Company constructed the final 1 mile 37 chain section of the road that had been previously surveyed by the government.<sup>129</sup> Tenders for the work closed 18 January 1894.<sup>130</sup> Local contractor JJ

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<sup>124</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines, 1893, paper 50, Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, p. 1

<sup>125</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1888-89: (Including Inspector of Mines Report), 1889, paper 81, p. 12.

<sup>126</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines, 1893, paper 50, Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 February 1894.

<sup>128</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 February 1894.

<sup>129</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31st March 1894, p. 9, Queenstown.

<sup>130</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 January 1894.

Gaffney was awarded the job under the supervision of Thomas Bather Moore, who had laid out the road.<sup>131</sup> Subjected to a considerable upturn in heavy traffic, the original section of the road between the Howard's Plains and Strahan was found wanting, its inferior construction preventing the cartage of heavy loads. A team of four horses was limited to hauling one ton of ore at a time. The trip to Strahan took two and a half days each way at a cost of £5 per ton.<sup>132</sup> Forced to rectify the situation, the government spent £1,500 on upgrading the section between Strahan and the "15 Mile."<sup>133</sup> The Mount Lyell Company contributed £1,300 towards the works from the "15 Mile" to its mine.<sup>134</sup>

From the Company's perspective, the road works produced the desired results, in the short term. The Company's ability to dominate transport operations was soon evident. Its freight costs decreased to £3 15s. per ton each way, whereas the Gormanston businesses had to pay up to £7 per ton because the teamsters gave preference to the Mount Lyell Company as it sent freight in each direction. The inability of the storekeepers to move their perishable items quickly from the Strahan wharf increased consumer costs and created a shortage in some lines of food at Gormanston.<sup>135</sup> The cartage of larger items still presented many difficulties, the mine boiler taking five and a half days to haul from Strahan.<sup>136</sup> As works progressed on the smelters, the inefficiencies and limitations imposed by road transport became obvious. Robert Sticht observed the rate of delivery over the twenty-six mile waggon road was barely a 100 tons per month. He considered the major causes to be the rough country traversed and the heavy rainfall, reaching 144 inches for the twelve months of 1895.<sup>137</sup> Sticht eagerly awaited the completion of the railway. He prioritised the freight carried by road as he considered it would 'seem money almost thrown away for the small advantage of getting the machinery for the enlargement of the 200 ton plant here only a couple of months sooner than the completed Railway would bring it.'<sup>138</sup>

The completion of the laying of the adhesive rails into Queenstown on Saturday 18 July 1896 saw an immediate reduction in the use of the road to Strahan. The Company could now maintain a regular supply of coke to its furnaces, and clear the

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<sup>131</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 February 1894.

<sup>132</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 June 1894.

<sup>133</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30th September 1894, p. 9, Queenstown.

<sup>134</sup> JPPP, Finance, 1894, 1895, paper 34, p. 34.

<sup>135</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 January 1895.

<sup>136</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 March 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 361, AOT.

<sup>137</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31st March 1896, pp. 17-18, Queenstown.

backlog of building materials and machinery stockpiled at Strahan and Teepookana. The advantages of rail transport were immediately apparent to all concerned. Bowes Kelly noted 'the facility of carriage afforded by the railway has been a great benefit to the Company, both in reducing the cost of freight and expediting the delivery of all supplies; as since the 18<sup>th</sup> July these have all been carried over the Company's line.'<sup>139</sup> The improvement in the general handling of freight was 'largely availed of by the public for getting goods up, and the present service is kept very busy.'<sup>140</sup>

The opening of the railway substantially reduced road traffic to and from Strahan, although the road was used for the droving of cattle to Queenstown.<sup>141</sup> For some years the government maintained the road.<sup>142</sup> As use declined further, it gradually fell into disrepair. In 1915 the Queenstown and Strahan Councils sought assistance from government to effect repairs as the road had fallen into a deplorable condition and it was almost impossible to herd cattle over it. In support of their claims, both Councils argued that the road was still needed as a safety measure in the event of a major mishap on the railway. The temporary damage to a small bridge on the line had already demonstrated the inconvenience caused to the community when the railway had closed for a relatively short time.<sup>143</sup>

The road remained neglected for many years. It was not until the opening of the road between Hobart and Queenstown, on 19 November 1932, that attention was again focused on upgrading the old road to Strahan. After considerable public agitation over five years the government finally committed to the project. Work on the twenty-six and a half mile road commenced simultaneously at Strahan and Queenstown on 18 March 1935. It was opened to traffic on 30 October 1937. Costing £40,000, the government believed the road would greatly benefit the State from industrial and tourism perspectives.<sup>144</sup> The newly completed road not only ended the isolation for Strahan, but it was considered that 'the trade of the West Coast was now in Tasmania.'<sup>145</sup>

The 1894 extension of the Howard's Plains road through to Mount Lyell, combined with the subsequent opening of the railway into Queenstown, had diverted

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<sup>138</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 3 September 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, pp. 226-227, AOT.

<sup>139</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30th September 1896, p. 7, Queenstown.

<sup>140</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 July 1896.

<sup>141</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 30 October 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 454, AOT.

<sup>142</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1900, 1900, paper 34, p. 9.

<sup>143</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 July 1915.

<sup>144</sup> *Mercury*, 1 November 1937.

<sup>145</sup> *Advocate*, 1 November 1937.

traffic away from the road through to Lynchford and beyond. The section between Lynchford and the Gormanston Gap became redundant. Its use was limited to a few prospectors and several owners who worked the several hundred acres of farming land to the east of Lynchford.<sup>146</sup> The balance section of the road between the “15 Mile” and Lynchford became the main thoroughfare for the cattle traffic between Strahan and Queenstown, the January 1902 completion of the road connection between Lynchford and Queenstown facilitating access to the South Queenstown abattoir.<sup>147</sup> By 1909 the road was reported to be three feet wide in places and partially blocked by land slips, overhanging scrub and fallen trees.<sup>148</sup> The Queenstown Council continued to maintain the track for some years to ensure the ongoing movement of stock through to the abattoir, although by 1915 it had fallen into a deplorable condition, along with the balance of the road through to Strahan.<sup>149</sup> Railways had superseded the early long distance roads on the West Coast and it was not until the advent of better road construction technologies and more modern cars with pneumatic tyres that roads again challenged as a relevant means of transport about the region.

### **Roads about Mount Lyell and the Outlying Districts**

Realising the futility of relying on roads as a practical and economic mode of transport about the region, the Mount Lyell Company devised a number of innovative transport strategies to overcome the rugged terrain, dense bush and poor weather. By September 1895 it had developed an extensive network of steam and horse drawn tramways and had built a substantial self-acting haulage line between the Iron Blow and the Reduction Works. The construction of its main line railway, which incorporated the use of a third “rack rail,” was well underway at the time.<sup>150</sup> The second major mining entity on the Mount Lyell field, the North Mount Lyell Copper Company, also decided against employing roads for the movement of freight and ore. Instead, it opted to use an aerial cableway, horse drawn and steam powered tramways about the mine and its rail terminus at Linda. The Company built a twenty-eight mile standard gauge railway between Linda, via its Crotty smelters, to the port at Kelly Basin. The through rail connection was opened to traffic on 24 September 1900.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>146</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 29.

<sup>147</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 January 1902.

<sup>148</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 May 1909.

<sup>149</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 July 1915.

<sup>150</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30 September 1895, Queenstown.

<sup>151</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 September 1900.

The completion of the two main line railways to Mount Lyell effectively removed the need for long and medium distance road freight to, from and within the region. However, the railways and tramways could not cater for the steep short-haul between the various communities and mines about Mount Lyell. This section looks at the development of the short-haul roads built about the Lyell region for the transport of mining freight, promote farming and timber-cutting activities and to reduce the effects of isolation by improving inter-town connections for those living and working in the fringe areas. It outlines the difficulties faced by cash-strapped municipalities to maintain the roads that quickly deteriorated in the trying conditions.

The first of the shorter roads built in the Lyell district was that between the Mount Lyell Company's smelters at Penghana<sup>152</sup> and the newly-surveyed town of Queenstown. The route for the one mile eight chain road followed easy grades and was chosen in the latter half of 1895 by Mr Low, the Government Inspector of Roads.<sup>153</sup> Construction was slow due to the difficulty in attracting men willing to work for five shillings a day. This amount was considered a starvation wage and was less than that paid to Zeehan miners. Furthermore, Queenstown had a poorer climate and a 20 per cent higher cost of living.<sup>154</sup> As the new township flourished, so too did the need to improve the road link with the mining town of Gormanston. The majority of the four-mile route from Queenstown, via the smelters, was upgraded during 1894, but its condition was still poor. Gormanston was by now a small thriving town. It had been officially proclaimed on 7 November 1893, in honour of Viscount Gormanston, the Governor of Tasmania.<sup>155</sup>

This road between the two settlements developed into a vital lifeline for the Lyell community, as daily supplies of food and general freight were carted between the Queenstown railway station and the various mining settlements located about the Linda Valley. Importantly, the road provided the opportunity for inter-town social and business activities and served as the main thoroughfare for people travelling to and from Hobart, over the Linda Track. Typical of all regional roads, it was very expensive to maintain. In August 1897 its condition was so disgraceful that the carters were forced to charge the exorbitant rate of 25 shillings a ton.<sup>156</sup> The road was considered to be most unfit for man and beast to travel over. In some places the cords floated in liquid mud. By July 1896 the heavy traffic had worn ruts into the road 'a couple of feet deep

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<sup>152</sup> The development of the towns about the region is fully discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

<sup>153</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 October 1895.

<sup>154</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 July 1896.

<sup>155</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 November 1893, p. 2135.

<sup>156</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 August 1897.



in places, with occasional boulders of rock sticking up between them.’<sup>157</sup> This time the Mount Lyell Company could not be called upon to contribute towards the works as it no longer depended on the road, its self-acting haulage now carrying workers, freight and ore between the Reduction Works and the Iron Blow mine. The construction of a steam drawn tramway between the Queenstown station and Gormanston had been mooted but the proposal never progressed past the survey stage. The locals were sceptical of the ambitious proposal and considered it would be built in the “sweet bye an bye”, as would the Great Western Railway, with both completed at the same time, ‘say the middle of the next century.’<sup>158</sup>

A shorter road route was investigated to reduce the travelling time between the two centres and to avoid passing close to the Penghana smelters. Work on the new road commenced in the latter half of 1897 at the Queenstown railway station. The new alignment extended along Batchelor Street, through the northern outskirts of Queenstown, known locally as “The Piggery,” and linked with the original road formation on the eastern side of the smelters. Built by day labour, the work was supervised by the Mount Lyell Company’s Railway Department.<sup>159</sup> The road was completed towards the end of November the same year, after which the Company began excavating the former road reservation, to build its new smelting plant.<sup>160</sup> The ongoing cost of maintaining the road proved a concern to successive town boards and governments. Funds for deviations, widening, upgradings and fencing had to be allocated in most annual works programs by the authorities charged with the upkeep of the road.<sup>161</sup>

A third road radiating out from Queenstown, to Lynchford, was built during 1901 and early 1902, in response to pressure placed on government by the Queenstown Town Board. It was anticipated the road would enable the intervening farming land to be thrown open for selection.<sup>162</sup> A sum of £1,000 was set aside by government in 1900,<sup>163</sup>

<sup>157</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 7 August 1897.

<sup>158</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 August 1897.

<sup>159</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 6 November 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 553, AOT.

<sup>160</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 20 November 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 699, AOT.

<sup>161</sup> Government contributions set aside in the Public Works Proposals towards the road works for sums of £400 and over between 1900 and 1916 included £2,500 (JPPP, paper 34 of 1900, p. 9), £1,200 (JPPP, paper 42 of 1901, p. 6), £1,200 (JPPP, paper 39 of 1908, p. 5), £400 (JPPP, paper 6 of 1910, p. 26), £600 (JPPP, paper 5 of 1911, pp. 27 and 33), £650 (JPPP, paper 6 of 1912, p. 44), £900 (JPPP, paper 24 of 1914, pp. 37 and 39), and £950 (JPPP, paper 25 of 1915, pp. 26, 32 and 36).

<sup>162</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 23 February 1900.

<sup>163</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1900, 1900, paper 34, p. 9.

with a further £750 allocated the following year to complete the works.<sup>164</sup> The construction tender was let in February 1901 to HW Coleman for £1,706 0s.10d.<sup>165</sup> Owing to inclement weather and the soft nature of the country involved, the work was not completed until January the following year. The new road was considered to be a first-class job. The *Mount Lyell Standard* reported that it would make ‘a pleasant track for cyclists, as well as for the many loving Queenstown couples who prefer to take their rambles and whisper “soft nothings” in each others’ ears in some secluded spot “far from the madding crowd.”’<sup>166</sup> Apart from the social benefits, the land near Lynch’s Creek was well suited to the growing of root crops, the fattening of store cattle and market gardening. The need to open up rural areas in the Lyell area was driven by the ‘ever-constant demand, locally, for produce of every kind.’<sup>167</sup>

By January 1897 Gormanston was a substantial commercial and residential centre, second only in size to Queenstown. Other nearby emerging areas included the mining town of North Lyell, perched on Philosopher’s Ridge, near the North Mount Lyell Copper Company’s mine, and the settlement of Linda, which was located at the head of the Linda Valley. A pack-track, a mile and a quarter in length, linked the North Lyell mine to the cart track that ran from the Gormanston Gap, via the Iron Blow, to Philosopher’s Ridge. The process of packing the rich North Lyell copper ore between the mine and Philosopher’s Ridge was both costly and inefficient, greatly contributing to the high cost of 30 shillings a ton to transport the ore the five miles to the railway station in Queenstown.<sup>168</sup> To reduce its ongoing transport costs, the North Mount Lyell Company entered into an agreement with government, on a pound for pound contribution basis, to construct the road all the way to its mine. The government committed £300 to the project.<sup>169</sup>

The construction of the road proved to be extremely fortuitous for the North Mount Lyell Company. On 20 October 1897 road workers uncovered an extremely rich outcrop of copper within the Company’s lease.<sup>170</sup> The magnitude of the discovery provided a great impetus to the Company and to the other mining ventures around Mount Lyell. It was anticipated that the find would ‘practically revolutionise the future prospects of this part of the Lyell field, demonstrating as it conclusively does that large

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<sup>164</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1901, 1901, paper 42, p. 6.

<sup>165</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 12 February 1901, p. 429.

<sup>166</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 January 1902.

<sup>167</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 29.

<sup>168</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 January 1897.

<sup>169</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 August 1897.

<sup>170</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 October 1897.

and rich ore bodies exist outside the big mine [the Iron Blow].<sup>171</sup> Despite the discovery of the rich ore, the construction of the road was protracted, mainly due to the Government not committing adequate labour resources to the project. After seven months work, sections of the alignment still required blasting and a bridge had to be built over the Mount Lyell Company's haulage way. Both the mining fraternity and those living at North Lyell eagerly awaited completion.<sup>172</sup> Upon its opening in 1898, the North Lyell road was subjected to heavy traffic. Life for the horses working the route was difficult and, by necessity, they had to be 'sound of wind and sound of limb or they will not stand the strain a day. Their lot in the hills, under severe climatic conditions and under the torture of the tedious, heavy road, is necessarily a cruel one.'<sup>173</sup>

With miners seeking to live closer to their work, the nearby shanty settlement of Linda was transformed during the latter half of 1899, with shops, a hotel and a post office established for the convenience of the settlers.<sup>174</sup> The town was located in the valley immediately below the North Lyell mine, and was close to both track and rail transport. To the east, the Linda Track could be followed to the King River and beyond to Hobart, and to the west the track continued on via Gormanston to Queenstown. Linda was the designated terminus for the North Mount Lyell railway. Direct communication between Linda and North Lyell was established after the government set aside £200 to construct the short, steep road.<sup>175</sup> Work commenced mid-1901 using day labour,<sup>176</sup> and was completed by January 1902. The *Mount Lyell Standard* anticipated the road would 'prove a boon to the men working on the mines and tradespeople who do business with the people living on the mines.'<sup>177</sup>

Once opened, the road attracted a large volume of traffic. It was subject to overloading, necessitating frequent repairs.<sup>178</sup> As mining at North Lyell continued to expand, so did the road use. The high cost of wear and tear soon became a burden for the Gormanston Town Board. By 1907 the Linda to North Lyell road was carrying large quantities of mining timber and general supplies. It was then considered to be the most important road in the Gormanston and Linda districts.<sup>179</sup> Traffic was partly

<sup>171</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 November 1897.

<sup>172</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 May 1898.

<sup>173</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 19 March 1900.

<sup>174</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 January 1900.

<sup>175</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1901, 1901, paper 42, p. 6.

<sup>176</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 October 1901.

<sup>177</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 January 1902.

<sup>178</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 January 1905.

<sup>179</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 June 1907.

alleviated by constructing a connecting link to the North Lyell to Gormanston Road. The government allocated £500 for the works.<sup>180</sup> Commencing in August 1912, they promised to facilitate access about the district for the residents of the area.<sup>181</sup>

Consequently, the expansion of industrial and residential activities within the Linda Valley placed considerable pressure on the local timber reserves. Demand for rural land in the area was also high, District Surveyor C Selby Wilson reporting in 1895 that

The rate of living on the mineral fields of the West Coast is abnormally high, consequent upon the necessity for obtaining supplies from distant markets. Hence there is an exceptionally good opening for those skilled in agriculture. With a ready market for produce of all kinds, a farming community should not hesitate in selecting at once available lands.<sup>182</sup>

The land immediately to the east of the King River, along the Linda Track, had been identified as eminently suitable for grazing. Surveyor, David Jones completed the survey of ten lots, each comprising approximately thirty acres, in January 1889.<sup>183</sup> The first two parcels were taken up in February that same year, the balance thrown open for selection in April 1894.<sup>184</sup> Adjacent Crown land, comprising low lying button grass plains, bounded on the north by the South Eldon River and on the east and south by the Nelson River, were progressively burnt, cleared and sown to pasture over the ensuing years. A survey of land in June 1919 identified a total area of 12,780 acres that was leased for pastoral purposes.<sup>185</sup>

Intensive logging practices, combined with the sulphur dioxide emissions from the Mount Lyell works, depleted the forestry resources in the Linda Valley within a few years. The opening of the new road between Gormanston and Linda in July 1901 proved to be 'the greatest convenience for both carters and pedestrians, who can now travel without getting knee-deep in mud.'<sup>186</sup> At the same time, the link between Linda and the King River was upgraded, the government providing £500.<sup>187</sup> The road construction contract was let to Dunkley Brothers in April 1901 for £1069 1s.11d.<sup>188</sup> The steep road linking Gormanston and Linda was not built to carry heavy traffic. That

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<sup>180</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1911, paper 5, p. 27.

<sup>181</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 August 1912.

<sup>182</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1895, 1896, paper 47, p. 20.

<sup>183</sup> Franklin 2, County of Franklin, Vicinity of Mount Owen, Reference Map 88002, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.

<sup>184</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1894, 1895, paper 39, p. 11.

<sup>185</sup> Franklin 1, Parish of Turrah, County of Franklin, Reference Map 88001, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.

<sup>186</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 July 1901.

<sup>187</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1901, 1901, paper 42, p. 6.

task would be left to the North Mount Lyell railway that was in the process of building a branchline to Gormanston.<sup>189</sup>

The completion of the road facilitated the extension of the Queenstown to Gormanston stagecoach service through to Linda. The twice-daily timetable provided passengers with a direct connection between the two competing railways, greatly improving passenger travel about the Lyell region.<sup>190</sup> The railway services to Gormanston would be short-lived. Following the amalgamation of the North Mount Lyell and Mount Lyell operations in May 1903, the uneconomic Gormanston branch line was closed on 7 September 1903.<sup>191</sup> Through the rationalisation process, the Mount Lyell Company diverted much North Lyell freight through its railway into Queenstown. This action added to the reliance on the through road traffic between Queenstown, Gormanston and Linda. The increase in road traffic to Linda necessitated ongoing improvements to the steep section between Linda and Gormanston.<sup>192</sup> In 1910 the Gormanston Council approached the government for assistance to upgrade the Linda Track on the eastern side of the King River. The Council sought to provide better access to both the Crown grazing land and the outlying stands of firewood. The application was successful, the government contributing £400.<sup>193</sup> Work began towards the end of 1912 and the road was built for a distance of sixty chains, to that of a summer road standard.<sup>194</sup>

As the population of the West Coast mining towns increased, so did the demand for farming land in and around Strahan. Access to these small isolated pockets of fertile land required a network of short distance roads. In 1899 the government set aside funds to construct a road from West Strahan to Ocean Beach and to the selections of Peever, Moore, and others,<sup>195</sup> the tender being let to AC Colbeck for £774 15s.6d in April the following year.<sup>196</sup> The Government also allocated funds to construct roads to the small

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<sup>188</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 2 April 1901, p. 864.

<sup>189</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 October 1901.

<sup>190</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 July 1901.

<sup>191</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 4 September 1903, File 5/3, Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>192</sup> Government contributions set aside in the Public Works Proposals towards the road works for sums of £300 and over between 1913 and 1915 included £300 (JPPP, paper 15 of 1913, p. 38), £400 (JPPP, paper 24 of 1914), and £300 (JPPP, paper 25 of 1915, p. 26).

<sup>193</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1910, paper 6, p. 26 - £200, and 1911, paper 5, p. 27 - £200.

<sup>194</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 January 1913.

<sup>195</sup> JPPP, Public Works Proposals, 1899, paper 34, p. 7.

<sup>196</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 3 April 1900, p. 437.

rural settlements of Opah in 1902,<sup>197</sup> to Lowana, near the King River, in 1908,<sup>198</sup> and towards the Big Henty River in 1914.<sup>199</sup>

Responsibility for building and maintaining West Coast roads did not fall solely to government. Road trusts were formed in accordance with *The Roads Act 1884* to enable the administration and undertaking of road works within prescribed districts. Funding was provided by fixing a road levy within the rates component charged by the Town Boards. The government contributed towards the operations of road trusts by making an annual contribution upon the accounts being audited by the Auditor-General. The first road trust formed in the Lyell region was that of Strahan in 1890,<sup>200</sup> followed by Queenstown in 1897,<sup>201</sup> and by Mount Lyell (Gormanston and Linda Valley area) in January 1898.<sup>202</sup> The proclamation for the Mount Lyell district was revoked the following month,<sup>203</sup> and was eventually replaced by the Gormanston Road Trust in 1900.<sup>204</sup> The 1898 return for the Town Board of Strahan showed 140 ratepayers contributed to the upkeep of 25 miles of roads, in Queenstown 747 ratepayers paid for the upkeep of 6 miles and in Gormanston 160 ratepayers maintained five miles.<sup>205</sup>

As mining and timber cutting activities increased throughout the Lyell area, so did the numbers of roads and formed tracks. Figures for the three municipalities varied considerably. The area of the Gormanston Municipality totalled 713,000 acres (1,114 square miles) which was less than the Strahan Municipality's 940,000 acres (1467.75 square miles) and substantially more than Queenstown's 38,000 acres (59.44 square miles). In 1914 Gormanston maintained 16 miles of macadamised roads and 181 miles of formed tracks (total 197 miles), Strahan had 12 miles of roads and 20 miles of tracks (total 32 miles) and Queenstown 16 miles of roads and 6 miles of tracks (total 22 miles). The Assessed Annual Value of all rateable properties within the Gormanston municipality came to £8,700, which was marginally more than that of Strahan's £7,482 and substantially less than Queenstown's £21,326.<sup>206</sup> An analysis of these figures reveals Gormanston maintained the most tracks and roads from a comparatively small rates base, while Queenstown was the opposite, with a large rates base and relatively

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<sup>197</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1902, paper 58, p. 4.

<sup>198</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1908, paper 39, p. 12.

<sup>199</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1914, paper 24, p. 39.

<sup>200</sup> JPPP, Road Trusts; Assessments and Contributions, 1882-1892, 1893, paper 97, pp. 2-3.

<sup>201</sup> JPPP, Road Trusts; Assessments and Contributions, 1893-1897, 1898, paper 70, p. 4.

<sup>202</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 18 January 1898, p. 303.

<sup>203</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 15 February 1898.

<sup>204</sup> JPPP, Road Trusts and Town Boards, Assessments and Contributions, 1896-1900, 1901, paper 43, p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> JPPP, Road Districts and Town Boards; Return of Ratepayers and Mileage, 1899, paper 25.

<sup>206</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1913-14, 1914, paper 35, pp. 343-345.

few miles of roads and tracks to maintain. The burden on the Gormanston ratepayers increased over the years. By 1934 the municipality was responsible for the upkeep of 226 miles of roads (40 miles metalled & 186 miles formed), as against Strahan's 28 miles (19 gravelled & 9 formed) and Queenstown's 22 miles (16 metalled and 6 gravelled). Unfortunately, Gormanston's rates base tumbled considerably, to be the lowest of the three municipalities, with an Assessed Annual Value of £4,425 as against Strahan's £6,867 and Queenstown's £23,616, making the upkeep of the roads a major issue for Council.<sup>207</sup>

The responsibility for the early construction of the roads and streets within the newly surveyed towns on the West Coast did not rest totally with the Town Boards. Under the provisions of *The Residence Areas Act* the Government provided assistance of ten shillings towards the construction of streets and improvements for every pound it received for the sale of Crown land.<sup>208</sup> Supervision of the construction works rested with the Town Boards. In many instances, due to the isolated nature of the region, works were completed prior to any government input or inspection. District Surveyor Wilson noted that the problems of poor standards and designs of the new roads arose through inappropriately qualified people supervising the works. He strongly advocated the appointment of Shire Engineers 'to conduct the work of all the West Coast towns...the desirableness of making such an appointment is so cogent as to require little advocacy.'<sup>209</sup>

The standard of the roads constructed in the Lyell region varied for several reasons. In Strahan the built-up settlement was scattered over a considerable area, from West Strahan around Long Bay to Regatta Point, which led to a high taxation rate spread over relatively few ratepayers.<sup>210</sup> Gormanston and Linda suffered due to the relatively high mileage of local roads to be maintained. Over the years, the Town Board had sought and gained some assistance from local mining companies to contribute towards road construction and maintenance. It was strongly argued that the government should contribute more towards the cost of providing and maintaining these roads as it derived a large revenue from the mining industry.<sup>211</sup> Queenstown, having relatively few

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<sup>207</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1933-34, 1935, paper 45, includes Part V Acreage 1933-34, p. 22, and Part VI Finance (Local Bodies), Property Valuation and Roads 1934-35, pp. 3 & 5.

<sup>208</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 July 1899.

<sup>209</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, p. 35.

<sup>210</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 January 1899.

<sup>211</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 June 1907.

roads to maintain and a high rates base, boasted ‘streets and roads which are unequalled in any mining town throughout the island.’<sup>212</sup>

The North Mount Lyell Company’s towns of Crotty, Darwin and Pillinger were all surveyed townships but were never developed mainly due to the premature demise in 1903 of the Company’s operations. Without substantial development, the local progress associations were unable to raise sufficient funds to build the infrastructure and so the road works were not well coordinated. In Crotty only the main thoroughfare between the railway station and the smelters (McKinley Street) and the small cross street past the post office (Trent Street) were constructed before the eventual demise of the smelting operations.<sup>213</sup> The few streets in Darwin were poorly constructed. Government assistance had been sought to help with their maintenance.<sup>214</sup> At Kelly Basin a progress committee was formed in 1899 to oversee the town’s affairs, the population being insufficient at the time to qualify for a Town Board. A number of streets were subsequently constructed, including Swarbreck Street, which housed the main public buildings and businesses.<sup>215</sup>

Contributing to the high maintenance costs of the roads in the Lyell region was the frequent practice of coupling three and four horses to overloaded drays. The ongoing illegal activity of contractors exceeding licence conditions and hauling the “crushing burdens” in carts with three inch width tyres drew the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* to comment that ‘the very life and heart are being continually cut out of the road by the practice in question.’<sup>216</sup> To remedy the situation, the paper called upon the local Town Board to do ‘a manifest duty and pass the necessary by-law if there be no “width of tyres Act” applicable to this district.’<sup>217</sup> In the more difficult areas, including the wood cutting district of the King River Valley, it was considered ‘eight-inch tyres would save the road, and perhaps give carters a month’s extra use of the road.’<sup>218</sup> The eventual use of rubber tyres on the West Coast roads would prove far less damaging than the iron tyres.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 June 1899.

<sup>213</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 February 1902.

<sup>214</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 July 1901.

<sup>215</sup> D Bannear, *King River to Kelly Basin Archaeological Survey*, Hobart, Department of Parks Wildlife and Heritage, 1991, pp. 67 & 89.

<sup>216</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 January 1905.

<sup>217</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 January 1905.

<sup>218</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 January 1913.

<sup>219</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 April 1918.



## Motor Transport and the Fight for a Road Connection with Hobart

The pending arrival of the first automobile in Queenstown created considerable local opposition. The reasons for the negativity are examined as are the inhibiting factors that saw motor travel on the West Coast lag behind the rest of Tasmania for nearly twenty years. The government's commitment to open up roads for tourists, coupled with ongoing improvements in road construction technologies and motor vehicle transport, contributed to a push to open up a road link between the West Coast and Hobart. Moves to explore a feasible route for a road to the West Coast are discussed, as are motives behind those backing the idea. The issue of isolation is also discussed. The local population claimed the region was more a suburb of Melbourne than part of Tasmania and the trend would continue unless the government paid attention to its demands. A subsequent report into the proposed road confirmed there was sufficient evidence to identify the West Coast as "Tasmania's lost province."

Graeme Davison, in his study of changing landscapes through the introduction of the car, contends that since the 1910s 'the car was a freedom machine, a physical expression of the liberal principles of free movement, free association and free enterprise.'<sup>220</sup> It is fair to say that anything but an air of freedom met FC Bird's 22 October 1908 application to the Queenstown Council for a license to carry passengers in his new car. Councillors were openly negative towards Bird's proposal to import the first car into Queenstown. After discussion, it was resolved that Bird's car should be regulated to a maximum speed of four miles an hour. The council determined that a special meeting would be convened to pass special by-laws restricting vehicular practices. Initially, Bird was granted an omnibus licence at a cost of thirty shillings and he was then charged another five shillings for his driver's licence.<sup>221</sup>

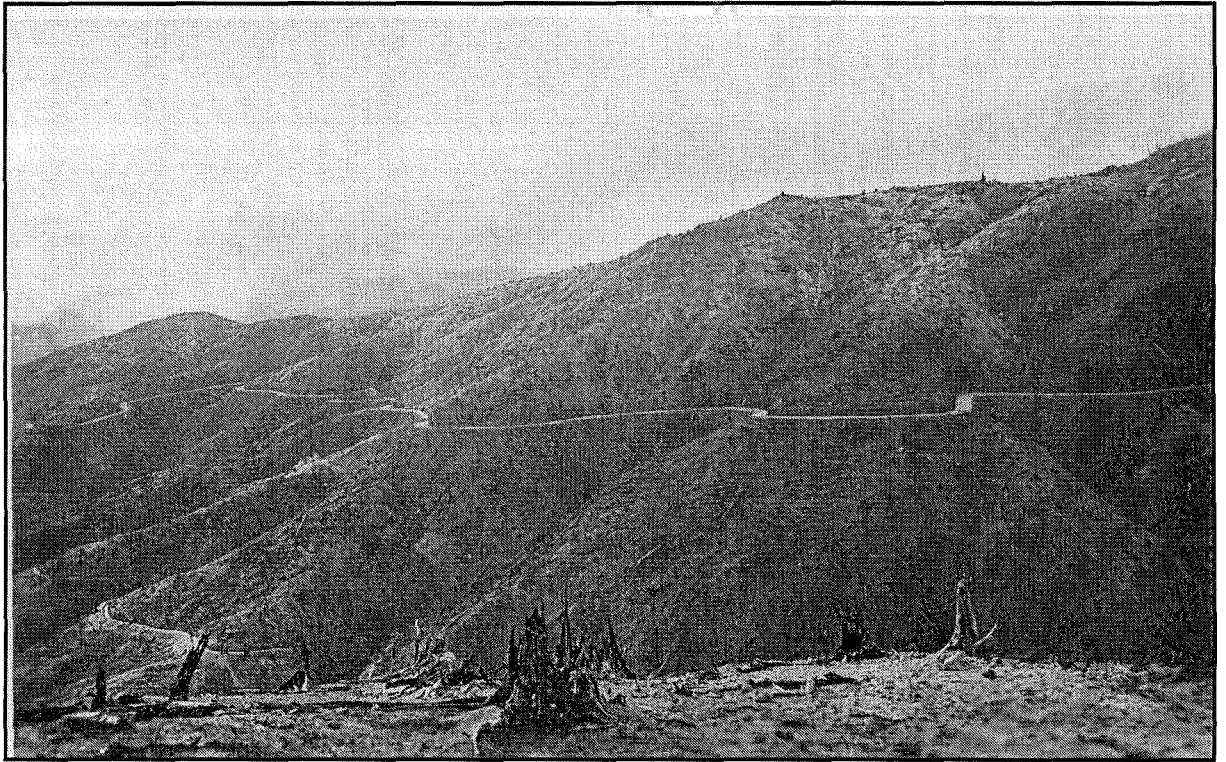
The 3 November 1908 arrival of Bird's car, the first on the West Coast, at the Queenstown station aroused much curiosity. His initial intention was to use the vehicle to carry milk between Queenstown, Gormanston and Linda, but this proposal created considerable concerns for the users of the narrow and winding road. The local member for Lyell, James Joseph Long, a former North Lyell miner and union organizer, immediately sought parliamentary intervention to prohibit vehicular traffic on the road as he considered the car would pose a dangerous risk.<sup>222</sup> Scare tactics were also employed, the Queenstown Council receiving an anonymous postcard depicting a car

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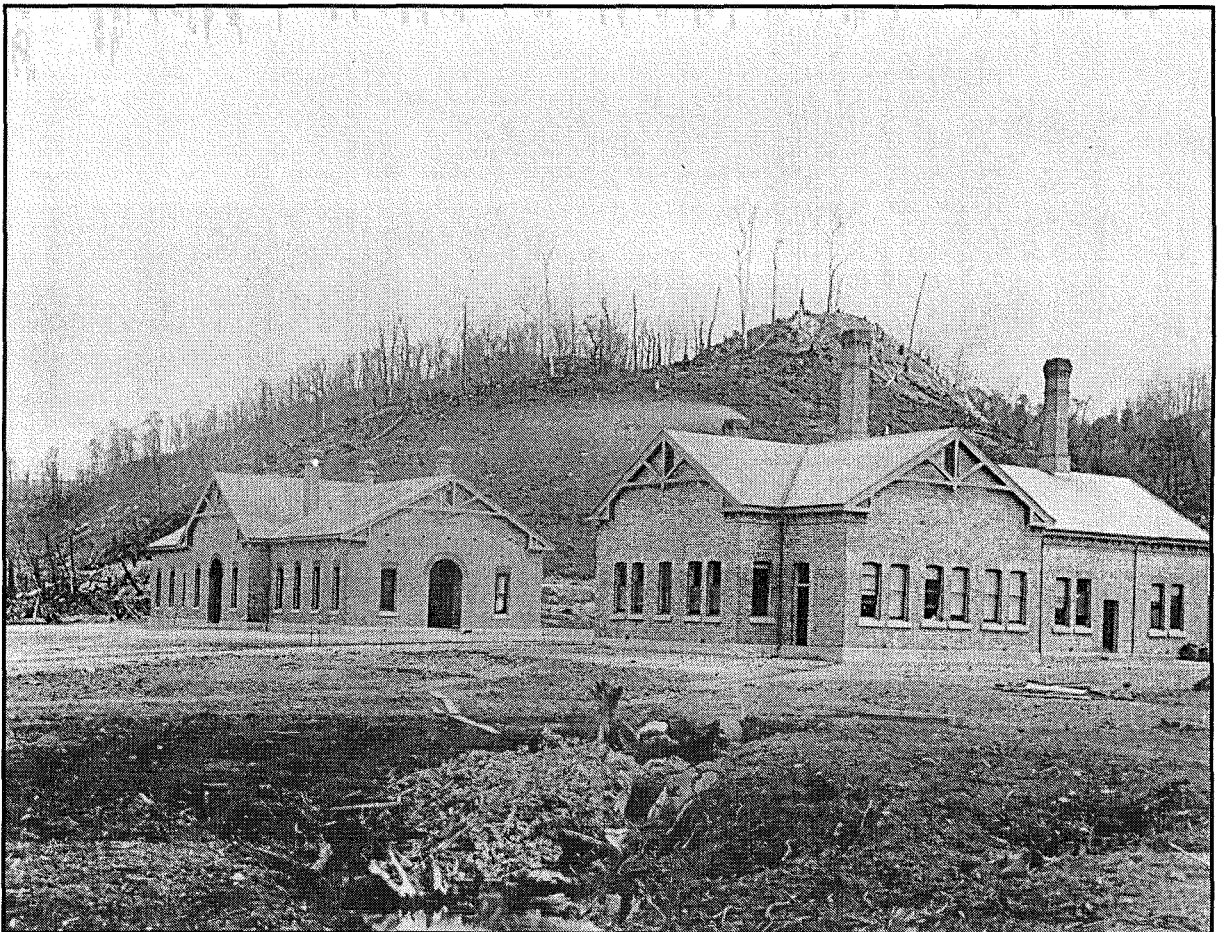
<sup>220</sup> G Davison, *Car Wars – How the car won our hearts and conquered our cities*, St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 2004, p. 114.

<sup>221</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 October 1908.

<sup>222</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 November 1908.



**ROAD QUEENSTOWN TO GORMANSTON – ‘THE 99 BENDS’**



**GENERAL OFFICE AND ASSAY OFFICE, MOUNT LYELL – c. 1900**

accident scene and inscribed 'Fancy horses meeting this on the Gormanston road.'<sup>223</sup> Despite the many protests, Bird successfully tested his car on 6 November 1908 through the streets of Queenstown. The event did not lead to the predicted accidents nor did it cause the horses encountered along the way to plunge or bolt.<sup>224</sup> However, Long's battle to curtail Bird's activities succeeded. A letter from the Premier, John William Evans, was tabled at the 2 December 1908 meeting of the Gormanston Council. It advised that motor car traffic on the Queenstown to Gormanston Road had been prohibited.<sup>225</sup>

The early vehicles arriving on the West Coast offered few advantages over the horse and cart. Petrol was expensive and not readily available, and there were few repair shops and qualified mechanics to service the vehicles. The early cars were uncomfortable and offered little protection against the inclement weather. The thin rubber tyres were susceptible to punctures from the many horseshoe nails that littered the streets of Queenstown.<sup>226</sup> Bird's introduction of motor transport to Queenstown came at a time when vehicular transport was still in its infancy in Tasmania. In March 1909 there were only 114 motor vehicles and 85 motor cycles registered in the State.<sup>227</sup> With few decent roads on the West Coast, the influx of motor vehicles was limited for several decades. This was also the case for many of the mining fields elsewhere in Australia, where railway networks monopolised passenger and the heavy freight traffic. In Broken Hill, the owning and servicing of motor vehicles began in earnest in about 1912, but business was slow to develop. Like Queenstown, Broken Hill was not undergoing residential expansion at the time and the flexibility and mobility of the private motor car was not required.<sup>228</sup>

As with Queenstown, the introduction of motor vehicles into Strahan was gradual. The proprietor of the Bay View Hotel, Mr Berkery, was the first to import a car, his new Ford arriving in Strahan during February 1917. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* suggested that West Coast councils should link their roads for the convenience of motor traffic.<sup>229</sup> As road networks improved and cars became more reliable, the general public began to accept motor travel as a valid mode of transport. A private motor service was

<sup>223</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 November 1908.

<sup>224</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 November 1908.

<sup>225</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 December 1908.

<sup>226</sup> G Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan Pty Ltd, 2001, pp. 297-298.

<sup>227</sup> Robson, *A History of Tasmania: Volume II Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, p. 305.

<sup>228</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode, Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger Pty Ltd, 1988, pp. 142-145.

<sup>229</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1917.

approved to travel on the Queenstown to Gormanston Road in 1920, Robert Sticht noting that it had saved the Mount Lyell Company from implementing such a service.<sup>230</sup> The advent of motor transport within the Lyell area helped reduce isolation and delayed the decline of Linda. People living in Linda could now travel to Gormanston in hire cars on picture nights for a shilling return. Cars were organised for balls and socials in Queenstown and to attend social gatherings held at the popular King River picnic grounds.<sup>231</sup> Blainey comments that 'at the end of 1921 Australia had seventy-five motor vehicles for each 5,000 people, but the 5,000 people on the Lyell field had only one solitary van, which had to be loaded on a railway truck to leave the district.'<sup>232</sup> While Blainey's figures appear understated, the point is made that without an outside road connection the district suffered a very low rate of vehicle ownership. The authorities noted that the standard of the roads about Mount Lyell would have to improve considerably as the advent of the heavy transport lorries and steam traction engines had caused significant wear on roads elsewhere in the State.<sup>233</sup>

The evolution of motor vehicle transport in Tasmania gradually fostered community acceptance that roads could compete with railways for passenger travel and small freight consignments. Improved designs, increased speeds and greater durability had made the vehicles an attractive alternative to rail, particularly for door to door services. The government aided and abetted increased competition by improving the State's road network. This initiative did not extend to the West Coast. On 27 August 1913, the government announced its intention to identify the main arterial roads in Tasmania with a view to taking over their maintenance. Supporting the move, Minister of Lands, Works and Mines, Edward Mulcahy, contended 'for years past our main roads have been in some parts sadly neglected, and it goes without saying that in a tourist country, and with the advent of the motor-car, the main avenues of road communication should be kept throughout in a state of consistent good order and repair.'<sup>234</sup>

The early push to build a tourist road to the West Coast was promoted by Carus Driffield, the Mount Lyell Company's Superintending Engineer of Railways. In his 25 May 1914 letter to the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, Driffield stated that

It is a misfortune to the State, and particularly to the residents of the Coast, that a direct land route is not available to them. It is more convenient, and often more expeditious, for residents of the

<sup>230</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 August 1920, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/338, pp. 74-75, AOT.

<sup>231</sup> EJ Wedd, *Linda, Ghost Town of Mt Lyell*, Queenstown, EJ Wedd, 1987, pp. 88-89.

<sup>232</sup> Blainey, *Peaks of Lyell*, p. 278.

<sup>233</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Lands and Works, Minister for Agriculture and Minister Controlling the Hydro-Electric Department, 1923, paper 14, pp. 9-10.

<sup>234</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Mines, 1913, paper 15, p. 11.

Coast to go to Melbourne rather than to Hobart...The modern motor car and good roads have adversely affected the passenger receipts of many English and Continental railways, and it is incontrovertible that travelling by motor car over a good road is much more expeditious and no less comfortable than by the ordinary mixed railway train.<sup>235</sup>

Driffield's vision would not put his Company's railway operations at risk as he advocated the building of the road, via Tyenna, only as far as Gould's Landing on the Gordon River. From this point he envisaged the tourists and travellers could enjoy the balance of the journey to Strahan by launch, taking in the scenic delights of the river and Macquarie Harbour along the way. The total travelling time from Hobart was estimated to be twelve hours, a vast improvement on the times taken for the trip by boat, or the indirect railway journey, via Burnie. The failure of the Great Western Railway proposal and the lack of economic mineral deposits in the intervening land had already ruled out the construction of a direct rail link between Mount Lyell and Hobart. Driffield's push for a road link with Hobart was fully endorsed by long-time advocate Bowes Kelly, Chairman of the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>236</sup> Kelly's support for the road was understandable. In 1902 he had purchased the Norton Mandeville farm, located in the Derwent Valley near Hamilton. If a road was constructed, Kelly stood to gain considerable savings in travelling times between his property and Mount Lyell.<sup>237</sup>

Another supporter of a road to the West Coast was Thomas Murdoch, President of the Hobart Chamber of Commerce. In July 1917 Murdoch envisaged that, apart from the trade opportunities to be gained by Hobart businesses, the road would open up vast areas of hinterland between Hobart, Port Davey and the Lake Country. He considered the better land could be cleared and farmed by out of work soldiers returning from the War and by the young men from the outlying rural areas of Hobart. Murdoch reasoned that 'to go now into this new country is nothing like what our forefathers undertook when they left their homes in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and came out 13,000 miles' to Tasmania.<sup>238</sup>

The idea of improving communication with the West Coast by constructing a "Soldiers' Road" gained wide support in the southern and western districts of the State, its cost estimated to be possibly one-tenth of a railway. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* considered that a "Great West Road" was long overdue and recommended that the West Coast municipal authorities, the public spirited citizens of Hobart and the various tourist associations all combine to support the proposal. The paper favoured a

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<sup>235</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 May 1914.

<sup>236</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 April 1915.

<sup>237</sup> D Wheeler, 'Anthony Edwin Bowes Kelly (1852-1930)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Volume 9, 1891-1939, pp. 552-553.

road in preference to a direct railway as it would 'afford a welcome and desirable means of more rapid transit, and abridge that isolation which has made the West Coast for many an undesirable quarter for permanent settlement.'<sup>239</sup> Reporting on the terrain between Tyenna and the Gordon River, Thomas Fowler, Engineer-in-Chief for Public Works, ruled out the construction of a road. The country was of rough character, required many large bridges and would employ 1 in 12 grade zig-zags on the steep rocky sidling over the Frankland Range. Fowler advised 'the investigations show that any road from Tyenna to the Gordon and the West Coast would necessarily be very circuitous.'<sup>240</sup>

Charles Whitham, the Secretary of the Lyell Tourist Association, wrote to Treasurer Lewis in late February 1918, raising the possibility of constructing the road from Derwent Bridge to Gormanston, following the route of the old Linda Track.<sup>241</sup> Agitation for a road connection to the West Coast continued to swell. At a meeting held in Hobart on 28 February 1918, attended by Bowes Kelly and a number of prominent local businessmen, a motion was unanimously passed for road communication to be established between Hobart and the West Coast. Its proponents envisaged the road would open up tourist traffic between the two centres and provide immense commercial benefits to Hobart. Most West Coast business was transacted in Melbourne because of the isolation of the West Coast. The meeting was informed that the Queenstown population preferred Melbourne as a holiday destination over Hobart because of the lesser travelling time of 29.5 hours by boat to Melbourne compared to the 35.5 hours taken to travel by rail to Hobart.<sup>242</sup>

Lewis was quick to respond to the push for the road connection to the West Coast, releasing estimated construction costs for three alternative road routes. The cheapest option, that from Hobart, via Ouse and Derwent Bridge, to Gormanston, was calculated at £165,000. Some 55 miles of the 158 mile route was still to be built. The second option, via Tyenna and along the old Great Western Railway route to Gormanston, was estimated to cost £250,000 for the 125 miles of road to be built. The cost of Drifffield's proposed 90 mile route from Tyenna to the Gordon River was estimated at £180,000, but it did not offer the vitally important through road connection. Lewis was cautious in his approach to committing the Government to building the road. He noted that advancements had been made in developing pneumatic rubber tyres and the likelihood

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<sup>238</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 July 1917.

<sup>239</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 February 1918.

<sup>240</sup> JPPP, Engineer-in-Chief: Report for 1917-18, 1918, paper 19, p. 5.

<sup>241</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 March 1918.

of reducing road construction costs, particularly on the West Coast. Lewis observed 'there is no doubt that after the war the use of motors for the carriage of goods as well as of passengers will be rapidly developed, and motors will be called into requisition to a far greater extent than ever contemplated a few years ago, and will take the place of railways in districts where the traffic is not very heavy.'<sup>243</sup>

Lewis was concerned that the proposed West Coast road would not enjoy sufficient use to justify the high construction cost and future maintenance charges. He raised the possibility of charging a toll.<sup>244</sup> Predictably, the Launceston *Examiner* adopted a parochial stance towards the southern proposal. The paper considered the proposition to be an obsession of the people of Hobart. It stated the 'advocates of the road at both ends [Hobart and Queenstown] might as well save their time and breath, for there is not the slightest prospect of the Government being foolish enough to propose the work, or Parliament to vote the money.'<sup>245</sup> The *Examiner's* sentiments may have been sufficient to stall the project. Other considerations included the shortage of labour for public work projects, mainly due to the heavy loss of young men at the War, and the existing embargo on the opening up of new areas of Crown land for selection. The latter imposition arose with the burgeoning cost of providing and maintaining roads to newly established areas. The Minister of Lands, Works and Agriculture, John Hayes, sought to discourage settlers from choosing the back country because it could not be serviced by roads in the foreseeable future. He considered 'the energies of the land-workers should be directed to developing settled areas instead of going further afield.'<sup>246</sup>

Despite the negativity, Parliament voted £1,000 to continue investigations into a road to the West Coast.<sup>247</sup> Exploration of the country between Lake St Clair and Gormanston was carried out in the first half of 1919, with the Secretary for Public Works, EH Kennedy reporting an excellent route for a track, capable of being converted into a main road. The alignment required twelve bridges and maximum grades of 1 in 20, most not exceeding 1 in 40. The cost of the forty-five mile route was estimated at £11,180 if built to a track standard and £63,000 if constructed as an eighteen feet wide road. Further identification work closer to Mount Lyell was to be made in the coming

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<sup>242</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 March 1918.

<sup>243</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 April 1918.

<sup>244</sup> *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 10 April 1918.

<sup>245</sup> *Examiner*, 13 April 1918.

<sup>246</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Agriculture and Minister Controlling Hydro-Electric Department, 1918, paper 36, p. 4.

<sup>247</sup> *Mercury*, 3 March 1919.

summer.<sup>248</sup> The Surveyor-General noted the gratification shown by the West Coast community for commencing the preliminary works, although he cautiously added that Parliament would, in all likelihood, initially authorise only an installment towards its cost.<sup>249</sup> The Hobart Chamber of Commerce was enthused by the progress. It anticipated great benefits for Hobart's business community. Apart from transporting saleable commodities, the road promised to open up timber, mineral and tourism opportunities.<sup>250</sup>

The effects of isolation and limited transport options were most apparent to the West Coast community during the early months of 1919, when boats from the mainland were being held over for long periods in quarantine to limit the spread of the influenza epidemic. The cost of rail freight for essential food items sent from Hobart, via the 363 mile circuitous route, to Queenstown was over 25 per cent higher than sea transport. On his visit to the West Coast in March 1919, Premier Walter Lee was informed by Andrew Lawson, Warden of Queenstown, that the West Coast was 'rather a suburb of Melbourne rather than a part of Tasmania.'<sup>251</sup> Lawson strongly advocated a through road and thought that railways were a thing of the past as motor lorries were taking their places. Lee responded circumspectly. He recognised the difficulties experienced on the West Coast and hoped to dispel the idea that the West Coast was a province of Victoria. Lee advised that the immediate construction of a road would be impossible as there were many settlers elsewhere still waiting on road access to their properties. Lee considered the matter of railway versus road transport required careful handling.<sup>252</sup> Apparently, Lee was unaware that survey works on the overland route were being carried out at the time of his visit to the area.<sup>253</sup>

Coming at a time of a mineral downturn on the West Coast, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* queried the need for major spending on a road that was solely driven by Hobart commercial interests. The paper commented 'it is quite clear that we must have inter-own (sic) communication by road on the West Coast before we seek the wider scope of inter-district communication by road with portions of Tasmania so far remote as Hobart...those at a distance must take their turn in due order of precedence.'<sup>254</sup> The Hobart Chamber of Commerce did not relent in its push for the road and in December

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<sup>248</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1919, 1919, paper 36, p. 2.

<sup>249</sup> JPPP, The Report of the Surveyor-General on the Department of Lands and Surveys for 1918-19, 1919, paper 34, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> *Mercury*, 3 March 1919.

<sup>251</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

<sup>252</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

<sup>253</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 March 1919.

<sup>254</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 March 1919.



1919 it met with the Minister for Works and Agriculture, John Hayes, seeking to have works commenced on the new West Coast track.<sup>255</sup> Exploration work on locating and mapping the Mount Lyell end of the route commenced in January 1920,<sup>256</sup> under the supervision of Mr W U Paton, Government Explorer of Roads.<sup>257</sup>

Paton's thirty-seven mile route did not follow the old Linda Track. Instead, it skirted the southern end of Lake St Clair, followed the Cuvier River Valley to Lake Petrarch, then traversed the southern slopes of Gould's Sugar Loaf at an elevation of 3,000 feet. At this point heavy construction work was identified for a distance of fifty chains over a steep and rocky sideling. From the 17 Mile, and on to the King River, the route avoided further precipitous country, although major works would be needed at the Inkerman and Balaclava Rivers. Paton anticipated the section between the Cuvier Valley (12 Mile) and the Inkerman River (20 Mile) would be subject to closures during winter on account of heavy snow storms. His route traversed large areas of land he considered suitable for grazing. It provided spectacular scenery for tourists and travellers alike, and promised to relieve the detached and isolated circumstances of West Coast residents.<sup>258</sup> Paton estimated the road surface would cost £53,400, the culverts £7,090 and the bridges £2,500, but he had added a further 10 per cent as a contingency for rainfall and transport difficulties during construction, making a total sum of £70,000 for all works.<sup>259</sup>

A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works considered the question of constructing the road from Lake St Clair through to Gormanston. At its 26 April 1920 meeting held in Queenstown, the Committee heard evidence that 90 per cent of supplies for the West Coast came from Victoria. Boats made two trips weekly from Melbourne as against only one from Hobart. The Queenstown Warden, Andrew Lawson, advised the Committee that he could travel to the mainland quicker and cheaper to transact business rather than making the laborious trip to Hobart. High rail freights and a reduced local shipping service had also hampered trade between Tasmanian ports.<sup>260</sup>

Subsequent Committee meetings in Gormanston, Strahan and Zeehan all received similar evidence supporting the construction of the road to Hobart, with all shopkeepers confirming their existing preference to transact their business in Victoria. Social,

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<sup>255</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 December 1919.

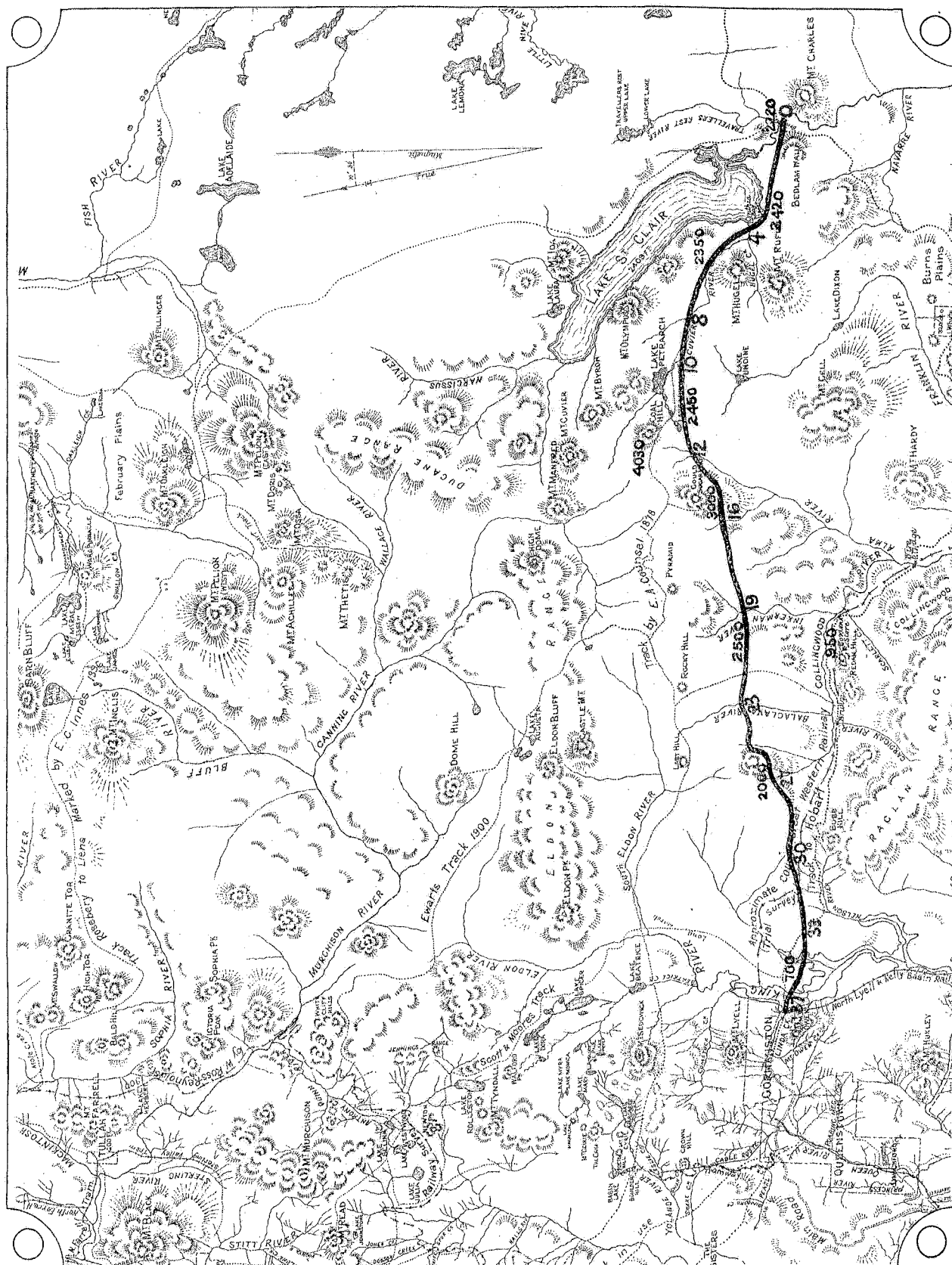
<sup>256</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 January 1920.

<sup>257</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 February 1920.

<sup>258</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal, 1920, paper 12, pp. 1-4.

<sup>259</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 May 1920.

<sup>260</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1920.



### MAP 14 – PROPOSED WEST COAST ROAD, WU PATON 1920

educational and farming opportunities were identified as likely to improve with the construction of the road.<sup>261</sup> As the Committee moved to take evidence in the north of the State, those at Deloraine generally supported the concept. They did, however, express a preference for a route that passed to the north of Lake St Clair, which would link with the road between Deloraine and the Great Lake. At the Launceston meeting it was contended that the road did not justify the expenditure involved and the West Coast's existing isolation was 'a matter of inconvenience rather than a serious commercial drawback.'<sup>262</sup>

At the Hobart meeting, Paton advised that a good formation could be obtained from Ouse to Lake St Clair, and that a sum of £4,500 had been passed in the previous session of Parliament for work on the track between Lake St Clair and Gormanston.<sup>263</sup> In his 27 May 1920 report to Parliament, Committee Chairman, Alex Marshall, endorsed Paton's proposed route between Lake St Clair and Gormanston and noted the likelihood of road closures in winter because of snow. The Committee recommended that £70,000 be appropriated to build the road. Marshall also noted 'there seems to be a certain amount of reason in applying the term "Tasmania's lost province," to the West Coast. The existing means of communication are such that the trade relations and general intercourse between the West Coast and the rest of the State are of a very limited nature.'<sup>264</sup>

Alternative road routes to the West Coast were proffered without success. Tom McDonald, the discoverer of the zinc-lead orebody at Rosebery in 1893, proffered the extension of the Nietta to Loongana Road, through to Tullah and onto Rosebery.<sup>265</sup> A second route via the Forth Gorge to Pelion Plains, thence to the Eldon Range and on to Mount Lyell, was put forward by Mr W Aylett of the Bluff River Tin Mines, near Tullah.<sup>266</sup> Final surveys of the proposed route through to Gormanston were completed in the summer of 1920-21, but lingering doubts persisted as to whether Paton's high level route, via Gould's Sugar Loaf, was appropriate. While the Government had financed the survey for reasons of political expediency, it did not commit to construction. The slump in copper prices during 1921 caused government to reconsider the issue. It was not prepared to make a firm commitment to spend £75,000 on what

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<sup>261</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 April 1920.

<sup>262</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 May 1920.

<sup>263</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 May 1920.

<sup>264</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal, 1920, paper 12, p. 1.

<sup>265</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 June 1920.

<sup>266</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 June 1920.

could prove to be a futile project, particularly when the very future of the principal mine in the region was in doubt.<sup>267</sup> Some preparatory works were carried out on a new bridge across the King River. These works provided temporary relief for the Lyell unemployed and afforded improved access to the grazing land on the eastern side of the King River.<sup>268</sup> In 1922 further work was carried out on the King River bridge and along a short section of the road towards Lake St Clair.<sup>269</sup>

### **Reclaiming the Lost Province**

It was not until 1925 that the focus again turned towards completing the road to the West Coast. The Mount Lyell Company's operations were again profitable and an expansion program implemented. Despite the area's strategic importance to the State, it effectively remained detached from the remainder of the island. This section deals with the final battle to win approval for the construction of the road and the eventual sense of relief as the shackles of isolation were finally broken, allowing Tasmanians from east and west to go out and explore the regions by road.

Upon being requested to review the proposed road route between Lake St Clair and the King River in 1925, Ross Reynolds, the Engineer of Works for the Department of Public Works, cast strong doubts on Paton's high level route. He suggested a low level road located between Paton's suggested path and the old Linda Track.<sup>270</sup> The level of public agitation for the road increased through 1926, the Lyell community demanding road access to other areas of the State. The loss of valuable internal trade to the mainland, the limited social outlets available to West Coasters, and a need to access timber belts and potential grazing land further to the east of the King River, were all touted as reasons behind the new push.<sup>271</sup> The removal of the local steamer service into Strahan further highlighted the disadvantages of living in isolation on the West Coast. The downgraded shipping services rendered local products more expensive and placed an even greater emphasis on trade and the development of social ties with Melbourne. In May 1926 a parliamentary delegation visiting the West Coast met with the communities to learn first hand about the general remoteness and the lack of social and travel opportunities available to the local population. The positive responses given by the politicians gave rise to speculation that road construction would follow in the near

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<sup>267</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 November 1921.

<sup>268</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1920-21, 1921, paper 45, p. 5.

<sup>269</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1921-22, 1922, paper 37, p. 6.

<sup>270</sup> JPPP, Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1924-25, 1926, paper 50, p. 5.

<sup>271</sup> *Advocate*, 23 March 1926.

future.<sup>272</sup> Initially rejected on the grounds of cost and impracticability, 'the evolution of transport methods and the development of motor traffic had demanded its construction.'<sup>273</sup>

Expansion of motor vehicle usage on the West Coast had been restricted by the lack of suitable roads, with less than twenty vehicles spread between the four municipalities that boasted a total population of about 9,000 people. Twelve of the cars were in the Queenstown and Gormanston areas, of which eleven had been imported during the previous twelve months.<sup>274</sup> Limiting immediate action was the lack of an approved surveyed route. The old Linda Track, as blazed by Thomas Bather Moore, was considered the more practical option.<sup>275</sup> Surveyor Colin Pitt was given the task of reviewing the alternatives. He officially rejected Paton's route and chose a path to the southern side of Mount Arrowsmith, and along the valleys of the Collingwood and Franklin Rivers.<sup>276</sup> Apart from the Mount Arrowsmith diversion, much of Pitt's route followed the old Linda Track through to Gormanston. Survey works were completed during 1928. Later that year tenders were called for the construction of the section east of the King River through to the Collingwood River.<sup>277</sup>

The tender for the seventeen mile section to the west of the Collingwood River was let in January 1929 to Messers Walter and Cunningham for £34,465 9s.1d.<sup>278</sup> Works commenced soon after, with good progress being made by September that year.<sup>279</sup> The tender for the eastern thirty and a quarter mile section, commencing half a mile on the Hobart side of the Clarence River and extending through to the Collingwood River, was let in November 1929 to Works Pty Ltd at a cost of £78,814 15s.9d.<sup>280</sup> The completion date for both sections was ambitiously set for May 1931.<sup>281</sup> Work on the road was hard and the conditions often extreme. Twenty years later Evelyn Temple Emmett, a former Director of the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau, recalled the road gangs included some of the hardest cases on earth. He considered 'the road when under construction was Port Arthur over again, except that members of the gangs chose their own colours in clothes and were not supplied with yellow and black uniforms, nor

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<sup>272</sup> *Mercury*, 17 May 1926.

<sup>273</sup> *Mercury*, 21 November 1932.

<sup>274</sup> *Mercury*, 27 May 1926.

<sup>275</sup> *Mercury*, 8 July 1926.

<sup>276</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>277</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Agriculture, and Minister Controlling Forestry, 1928, paper 17, p. 6.

<sup>278</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 22 January 1929, p. 317.

<sup>279</sup> *Examiner*, 6 September 1929.

<sup>280</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 19 November 1929, p. 2470.

<sup>281</sup> *Advocate*, 2 November 1929.

haircuts, at Government expense.<sup>282</sup> Following the completion of the western section on 23 March 1932, and the eastern section on 4 April 1932, contracts for the final paving of the formed sections were let and works were well in hand by the end of June 1932.<sup>283</sup> The total construction cost for the fifty-one and one third miles between Derwent Bridge and the King River Bridge amounted to £146,124. Construction was financed jointly by the State and Commonwealth Governments under the Federal Aid Roads Scheme.<sup>284</sup>

Before the completion of the highway, the government commenced promoting the road's spectacular scenic appeal. The Tourist Branch held high expectations that the road would prove popular with tourists, and anticipated that it would bring new business to the State.<sup>285</sup> Passenger and mail services over the new road officially commenced on 1 September 1932, although the road had been passable to motor vehicles for some months. The occasion was not lost on Russell Murray. Acting in his dual role of Manager of the Mount Lyell Company and Warden of Gormanston, he commented that 'we have waited long and patiently for this outlet, which will bring us so many advantages and do much to alter our outlook with regard to the rest of Tasmania, with which we have hitherto seemed to have had but little association.'<sup>286</sup>

Similar sentiments were also expressed by the Premier of the day, John McPhee, who anticipated that the direct communication would repair the previous lack of interest shown by the Tasmanian communities towards each other. The *Mercury* considered the new road would offer a wider scope for business opportunities, provide a chance for Tasmanians to expand their knowledge about the State and enable a welding of interests to be forged between West Coasters and the rest of Tasmania. Queenstown's Warden, V O'Halloran, anticipated the gloomy clouds of isolation would be dispersed and 'direct contact with the seat of Government must result in a better and more sympathetic understanding of the requirements of this important industrial centre, which after long years, has been reclaimed as a province of Tasmania.'<sup>287</sup>

The completion of the road produced an immediate impact, with large numbers of visitors journeying over the road to Queenstown. Many business people headed to the mining town to sell their various wares. Murray took a close interest in the unfolding events. He noted that large numbers of lorries carrying all classes of merchandise were

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<sup>282</sup> ET Emmett, *Tasmania by Road and Track*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1962, p. 75.

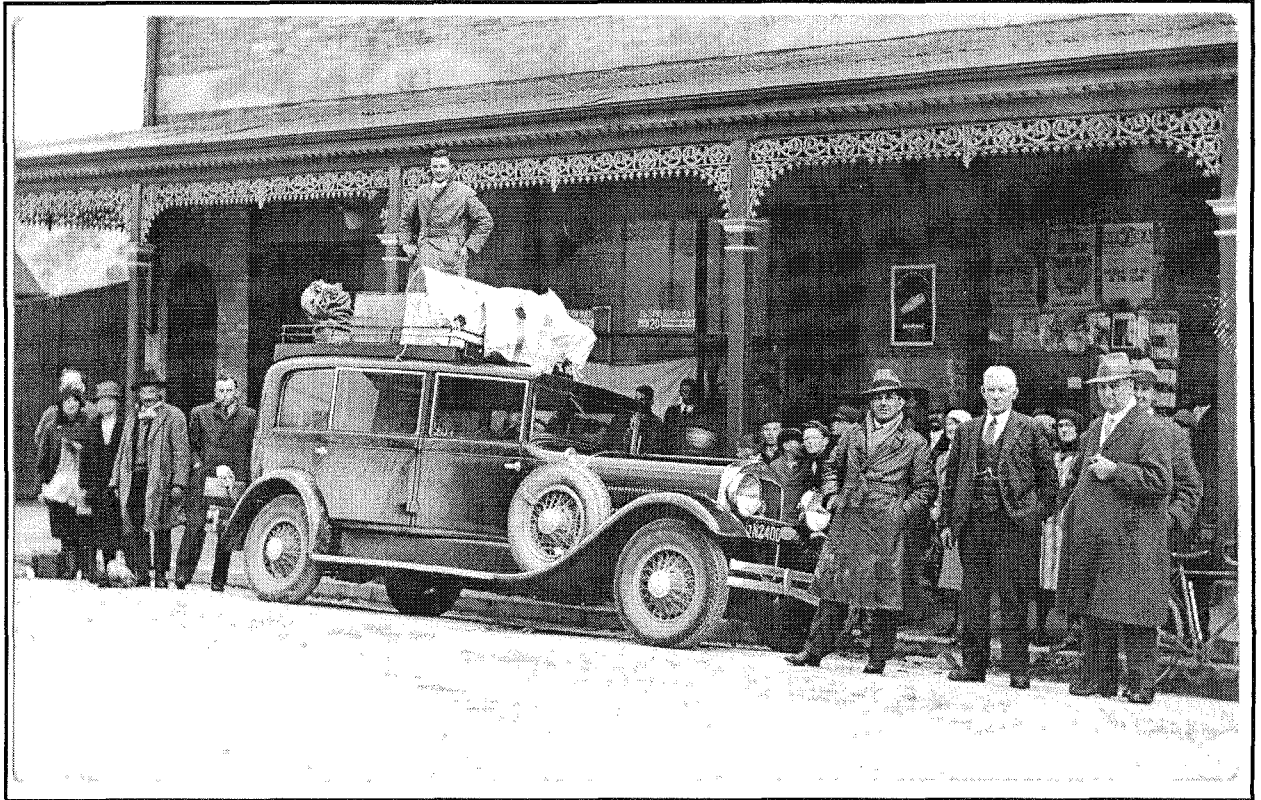
<sup>283</sup> JPPP, Director of Public Works: Report for Year 1931-32, 1932, paper 24, p. 2.

<sup>284</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>285</sup> JPPP, Report of the Government Railways for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1932, 1932, paper 14, p. 5.

<sup>286</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>287</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.



*MERCURY CAR IN QUEENSTOWN AFTER OPENING OF WEST COAST ROAD, 1932*



**OFFICIAL OPENING OF WEST COAST ROAD BY LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR  
SIR HERBERT NICHOLLS – KING RIVER, 19 NOVEMBER 1932**

now making frequent trips, the principal freight carried being farm produce and other perishables. He was concerned that the biggest proportion of existing inward rail freight that came from Burnie, via the Emu Bay and Tasmanian Government Railways, and then over his Company's line into Queenstown, would now be lost to road traffic. Murray accepted that rail freight charges for these goods would need to be reviewed downwards should the railways wish to continue to compete for the traffic. He was not so confident that road transport would cope with carting heavier materials. Murray considered the Company's Abt railway was unlikely to be affected by road competition to any great extent because the Company exported the copper through its port at Regatta Point, bound for overseas markets.<sup>288</sup>

The formal opening of the West Coast Road was held on Saturday 19 November 1932, the ceremony being performed near the King River Bridge in front of 500 people by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Herbert Nicholls. At the ceremony the Minister for Lands and Works, Sir Walter Lee, sought to diffuse any parochial criticism of the road when he expressed his Government's commitment to complete the Deloraine to Marlborough link road. Expected to cost in the order of £38,000, this road promised to open up the West Coast to all Tasmanian communities. Phil Kelly, the Labor Party representative at the opening, expressed a hope that road links would also be forged to Strahan and Zeehan.<sup>289</sup> The event was well celebrated. ET Emmett lightheartedly contended that on the evening of the official opening there were only three sober men in Queenstown, and they would not have been sober except for the fact the beer had run out. Emmett believed the "coasters" had good reason to be excited for they had been imprisoned for over a hundred years, a situation that would have continued had not 'a fairy godmother – to wit the Federal Roads Subsidy – released them at long last.'<sup>290</sup>

Not surprisingly, the new road continued to be extremely popular. It played a pivotal role in uniting the east and west, evidenced by Russell Murray's December 1932 observation that 'this holiday season has been unusual, and has been marked by an extensive exodus of local residents via the overland road to Hobart and elsewhere, and a corresponding influx of visitors.'<sup>291</sup> The virtues of the 158 mile route were extolled far and near. The Government Tourist Bureau described the road as superior, offering a variety of magnificent scenery unequalled in the Commonwealth. It considered 'the

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<sup>288</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 23 September 1932, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/354, pp. 330-331, AOT.

<sup>289</sup> *Advocate*, 21 November 1932.

<sup>290</sup> Emmett, *Tasmania by Road and Track*, p. 74.

<sup>291</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 30 December 1932, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/354, p. 522, AOT.



traveller who can make his first journey into Queenstown unmoved by the strangeness and grandeur has something wanting in his composition.'<sup>292</sup> The year 1932-33 saw an influx of visitors to Tasmania. The West Coast Road proved very popular, with many tourists 'loud in their praise of its scenic attractiveness.'<sup>293</sup> The road between Granton and Queenstown was proclaimed a State Highway on 8 June 1933, in accordance with *The State Highways Maintenance Act, 1929*.<sup>294</sup>

The opening day commitments and wishes expressed by both Lee and Kelly were to be held in abeyance for some time. Despite encouraging signs of a slow and steady advance towards financial and economic recovery during 1933, the general situation in Tasmania was still extremely difficult, particularly in regards to employment. The government remained cautiously optimistic but was mindful of the three years of debilitating social and economic impacts caused by the Depression. It was only prepared to spend money on essential works. Direct road access through to the North and North West Coasts was finally achieved on 17 February 1937 when the twenty mile "Missing Link" between Swan Bay, located on the south western side of Great Lake, and the road to Queenstown, was finally opened.<sup>295</sup> Travelling time between Queenstown and Strahan greatly improved with the completion of the twenty-six and a half mile road on 30 October 1937, as discussed earlier in the chapter. This same date also marked the commencement of works on the Queenstown to Zeehan Road,<sup>296</sup> which was eventually opened 7 October 1941, the building having been delayed through the outbreak of war and a shortage of road construction machinery.

## Conclusions

The development of the network of tracks about the Lyell region was essential for the preliminary exploration of the area. The pack-tracks reduced the effects of isolation by facilitating the movement of prospectors, packers, miners and drovers between districts and the adjoining regions. Successive governments invested considerable funds in cutting, constructing and maintaining these thoroughfares. As District Surveyor C Selby Wilson observed 'the expenditure of a few thousand pounds on roads and tracks is comparatively insignificant compared with the benefit to be derived from

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<sup>292</sup> Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau, *The West Coast Wonderland and The New Motor Road*, Hobart, Government Printer, 1934, pp. 6-11.

<sup>293</sup> JPPP, Report on the working of the Government Railways and Ferry Service for the Year Ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1933, paper 15, p. 5.

<sup>294</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 11 July 1933, p. 1271.

<sup>295</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

<sup>296</sup> *Mercury*, 1 November 1937.

the discovery of even one mine giving employment to several hundred miners.<sup>297</sup> The intensive track-cutting program implemented by Counsel created considerable expectation of rich mineral discoveries. Two years later, and after cutting 424 miles of tracks, all Counsel could report was the collection of 'much useful information.'<sup>298</sup> On the perceived lack of success of the track-cutting program, Premier Walter Lee commented 'we have expended money on tracks, and found it thrown away.'<sup>299</sup>

Like the tracks, the construction and maintenance of roads suffered through the unsuitable climate and terrain. Roads were successfully used for short haul cartage over the steeper terrain, and provided a means of communication between the local mining communities, mines and outlying settlements. The first motor vehicles on the West Coast were treated as novelty items. They provided little benefit to an area where roads, fuel outlets and mechanical repair services were few and far between. This perception changed as road construction techniques improved, the designs and construction of the automobiles became more robust and, importantly, government pushed ahead to extend the road communication network across the State. While the West Coast was not isolated in the strictest of terms, as rail and sea transport provided a slow and costly means of communication with the outside world, there was no quick escape. After World War 1, following a series of strikes, a serious outbreak of influenza and the withdrawal of the local shipping service from the West Coast run, the true extent of their isolation became obvious to West Coast residents. At a time when the government was wavering in its commitment to build the road to Queenstown, the town's Warden, Andrew Lawson, drew to the Premier Walter Lee's attention that the West Coast was more akin to a suburb of Melbourne than part of Tasmania.<sup>300</sup>

Vehicles provided a spirit of travel and exploration and offered emancipation from the inconveniences of the railway.<sup>301</sup> As leisure time and prosperity generally increased after the War, the roads bestowed a quicker means of transport. They opened up travel opportunities for those who could not afford to travel outside their state. Tourism became a major industry. Areas previously untapped by railways were opened. The roads competed with railways and coastal ships for passengers and cargoes, they were 'part of a revolution in transport which affected all people, their habits, work, leisure

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<sup>297</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, p. 40.

<sup>298</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 14.

<sup>299</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919

<sup>300</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

<sup>301</sup> Davison, *Car Wars*, p. 115.

and standard of living.’<sup>302</sup> In March 1929 A McIntosh Reid, the Director of Mines, advocated a West Coast road construction program into the areas not touched by railways and tramways. Reid correctly predicted that ‘the future of the Western division will follow closely the future of the highway extensions there.’<sup>303</sup>

The 1 September 1932 inauguration of daily services over the new road between Lake St Clair and Queenstown saw the shackles of isolation broken, ‘restoring to Tasmania in full measure its lost province.’<sup>304</sup> The need to travel to Melbourne for holidays, to shop and to transact business was substantially reduced. Hobart was now in easy driving distance. Russell Murray observed ‘the West Coast had been previously regarded as a part of Victoria, but the road had altered things, and visits could be made to other parts of the State in much less time.’<sup>305</sup>

The effect of the road on the Lyell population was profound. Blainey observes the road removed the ‘sense of utter isolation that had dominated the people of Lyell for a generation...but it possibly destroyed some of the friendly spirit and community liveliness that acute isolation bred.’<sup>306</sup> Subsequent extensions to the road network over the following decade saw the Lyell population provided with a more direct road route to the north of the State, via Great Lake and Deloraine, and with access to Strahan and Zeehan. The following chapter looks at the evolution of the railways and tramways about the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region, which preceded the roads as the dominant form of overland travel for nearly four decades.

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<sup>302</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, p.299.

<sup>303</sup> JPPP, Report of the Director of Mines for Year Ending December 31, 1928, 1929, paper 4, p. 12.

<sup>304</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

<sup>305</sup> *Advocate*, 21 November 1932.

<sup>306</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 279.

## CHAPTER 5: 'WE FIND A WAY OR MAKE IT' - RAIL SYSTEMS 1893 - 1935

### Introduction

The important role played by railways in opening up previously isolated and unproductive land on the West Coast had been established by 1892, when the promoters of the Mount Lyell railway first contemplated building their line to Strahan. Caught in the euphoria of establishing the copper mining venture at Mount Lyell, the Company's principals, consultants and supporters all demonstrated a genuine lack of knowledge and a high degree of naivety concerning the issues that would confront the financing, identification and construction stages of the railway. At the 30 November 1892 meeting of the Select Committee convened to consider *The Mount Lyell Tramway Bill (Private)*, Chief Secretary, Adye Douglas, advised the Committee there would be no difficulty in raising the £250,000 to build the smelters and the railway.<sup>1</sup>

The push for the railway was supported from all quarters. In February 1893 Alexander Montgomery, the government's Geological Surveyor, identified the railway as a key component of the venture's success. He considered that 'when the railway is completed from Strahan, and the disadvantage of inaccessibility now experienced is thus removed, it would be difficult to imagine a mine better situated for economical working.'<sup>2</sup> Montgomery's views on the importance of the railway were soon fully endorsed by Edward Peters, the visiting American metallurgist. Although experiencing firsthand the hardships of the extreme weather and difficult country, Peters' comments on the ground to be traversed by the railway were erroneous. He reported that:

This railway is absolutely essential to the economical running of the mine...a satisfactory route has already been surveyed and late developments have shown that it need be only 18 miles long and without a single heavy grade in its entire extent.<sup>3</sup>

The eventual route chosen, via the King and Queen Rivers, would prove to be 'steeper than any grade that had hitherto been attempted by Australian railway engineers.'<sup>4</sup> Peters had realised that the traditional railway construction methods would be expensive and he urged the Company to avoid a natural bias towards English methodology when building the railway. He considered the Company should seek innovative solutions, as applied elsewhere in the world:

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<sup>1</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), *The Mount Lyell Tramway Bill (Private)*: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1892, paper 119, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3; Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu, 6 April 1893, paper 50, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Report by ED Peters report to the Directors on the Property of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, 15 May 1893, p. 4, Mount Lyell records, Queenstown, Tasmania.

We can thus with perfect safety build all bridges and trestle-work in the lightest possible manner; whilst instead of using the wide and ponderous road-bed formation and the utterly superfluous deep layers of ballast which had been adopted in this Colony from English models, where a high speed was desired, and a vast traffic maintained, we can copy the plans universally adopted in newer countries, where only a low rate of speed is to be maintained and trains are to be light.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter outlines the difficulties faced by the surveyors as they explored the countryside between Strahan and Mount Lyell. It documents the Mount Lyell Company's adoption of the controversial route via the Queen and King Rivers and its innovative solution to build the first Abt Railway in Australia. Project financing became a major problem and it required several resourceful strategies by the Company to tide it through the difficult times. The early part of the chapter deals with construction difficulties within the extreme environment and the innovative techniques used to overcome the terrain and complete the railway through to Queenstown in nineteen months. Before fully establishing the railway, the Company encountered bitter parochial prejudices and a manipulated local and overseas press campaign that threatened the very existence of the Company. The challenges presented to the railway are detailed in what Blainey terms 'the costliest feud in Australian mining.'<sup>6</sup>

The chapter examines the Company's tactics in dominating negotiations with transport operators and government to achieve the desired outcomes that enabled the railway to become a very lucrative venture, a fact well hidden from all but Company officials. Railways and tramways about the region were to become a way of life. For more than thirty years the Abt Railway provided the principal means of transport. It facilitated travel for the many Lyellites who made their way to Victoria for recreational, business and personal purposes, giving rise to the West Coast becoming "the lost province." The last section deals with the benefits bestowed on the Lyell area by the implementation of a network of light tramways.<sup>7</sup>

### **A Controversial Beginning**

While it was accepted that the construction of a railway to Macquarie Harbour would resolve the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's long-term transport needs, few problems had been anticipated with building and financing of the line. Both

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<sup>4</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> The Mount Lyell Company also utilised a number of horse drawn tramways, inclined haulages, aerial ropeways and water flumes to convey materials about the countryside. Whilst these methods were individually important over specific stages of the Company's development, they did not confer the same benefits as did the railway network. Consequently they are not examined in this thesis in any detail.

of these aspects became major issues. This section identifies the difficulties faced by the surveyors in locating a suitable route and outlines the considerable opposition endured by the Company upon choosing the steep King River option and implementing its innovative Abt System. When first commencing work on the route identification the surveyors did not possess any reliable maps of the area. Limited information was gleaned from prospectors and by investigating existing tracks and roads in the area. The railway's enabling legislation, the *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act*, provided latitude compared to a conventional railway.<sup>8</sup> The line's minimum gauge was 2' 6", the curves restricted to no less than four chains radius and the maximum grade set at one in thirty-three. Notwithstanding the flexibility provided by the legislation, and the confidence previously expressed by both Peters and Montgomery, the Company was unwilling to commit to selecting its smelter site until after the railway route had been chosen.<sup>9</sup>

Preliminary survey works commenced at Strahan on 15 March 1893, supervised by the Company's Engineer, Frederick Alfred Cutten. Assisting him were surveyors De Mole, Westgarth, Grove, Batchelor and Sale and a team of survey assistants and line cutters.<sup>10</sup> From the outset, the surveyors encountered considerable difficulties. De Mole and Sale became scrub bound as they unsuccessfully attempted to locate the track to Mount Lyell cut in 1883 by George Meredith.<sup>11</sup> Much effort was spent trying to locate a route close to the existing dray track via the Tully River and Howard's Plains, to Mount Lyell. After three months of toil the surveyors were deployed in the vicinity of the Queen and King Rivers, to the south of Mount Lyell. It was thought that easy grades could be obtained along the Queen and King River valleys, all the way to Macquarie Harbour. The option was dismissed because Cutten considered the steep gorge encountered immediately below the confluence of the two rivers 'was not particularly safe.'<sup>12</sup> Cutten found a compromise. The railway could detour around the gorge by following the Queen River to its junction with Hall's Creek, climb the saddle to near the creek's source, and make a downhill run alongside Sailor Jack's Creek, to the King River. Emerging immediately to the west of the gorge, Cutten's proposed

<sup>8</sup> The standard specifications for Government Railways in Tasmania, as per the Strahan to Zeehan railway, were a 3' 6" gauge, curves a minimum of five-chains and a grade of one in forty. Similar specifications applied to the privately built Zeehan to Dundas Railway - Clause 4, *The Mount Dundas and Zeehan Railway Act*, 28 November 1890.

<sup>9</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 March 1893.

<sup>10</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 March 1893.

<sup>11</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 April 1893.

<sup>12</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1894, paper 59, p. 4.

route then continued along even grades to Pine Cove, a short distance to the east of the mouth of the King River. This small inlet appeared well suited for the Company's future port needs.<sup>13</sup>

In total, Cutten and his survey teams cut 302 miles of tracks and ran 225 miles of traverses through almost impenetrable country, in very trying weather.<sup>14</sup> Life for surveyors working on the survey was extremely difficult. The men encountered broken rock escarpments, entangled vegetation, freezing water, bitter weather conditions, while working in wet and torn clothing. The *Mercury* was most impressed with their efforts reporting:

To convey a realistic idea of the privation, peril, physical exertion and suffering experienced by all connected with these surveys, is hardly possible. Not merely upon occasions, but continuously, in the precipitous gorges of the King and its affluent water-courses (and corresponding lines on the Henty side), the labour of cambering along anything like a set course was next to superhuman...the managing of instruments, the obtaining of stores, all the necessities of the work; and the work itself were matters calling for the very best display of man's best qualities of body and spirit to do and endure, through exercise of faithfulness to duty and hope of victory in the end.<sup>15</sup>

Cutten's efforts to locate a suitable route had been exhaustive, and were bound to attract considerable criticism. His preferred option encompassed far steeper grades than attempted by railway engineers elsewhere in Australia. Legislative amendments were required to validate his recommendations. On 29 August 1893 the Company gave notice of its intention to seek parliamentary approval to validate its innovative approach to railway construction. Both the Abt and Fell Systems were nominated as being suitable for conquering the steep grades.<sup>16</sup> The Company's 30 September 1893 half-yearly report endorsed Cutten's selection of the King River to Pine Cove route. It further advised that in order to avoid 'what would prove to be a very expensive piece of country over which to construct an adhesive line, it has been found that it will be necessary to adopt the ABT or FELL System for a distance of about 3½ miles.'<sup>17</sup>

The Company's decision was particularly brave. No one from within the Mount Lyell Company or the Tasmanian Government Railway Department possessed a detailed working knowledge of either system. In giving evidence to the Select Committee, convened 19 September 1893 to consider the proposal, Cutten advised that he relied on information published on the Abt railway built over the Hartz Mountains in

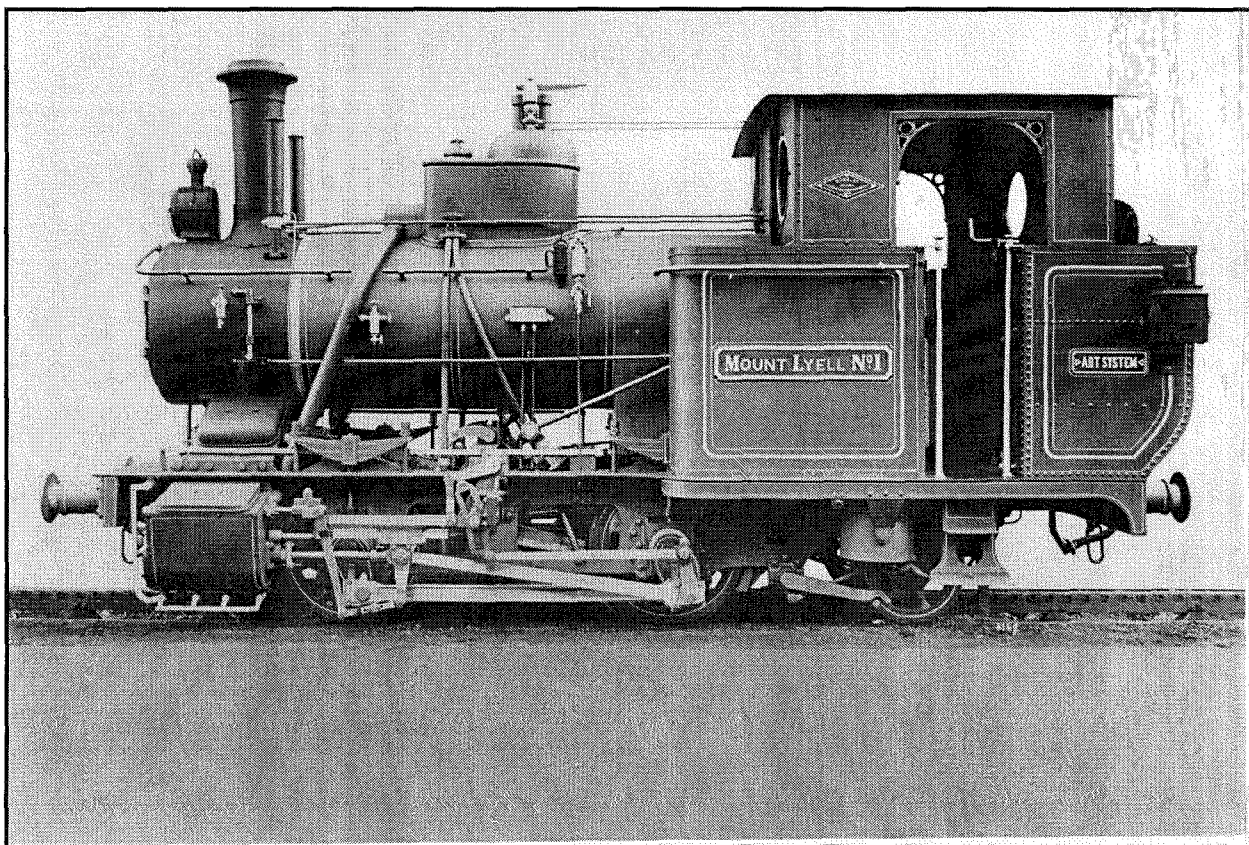
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<sup>13</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1894, paper 59, p. 4.

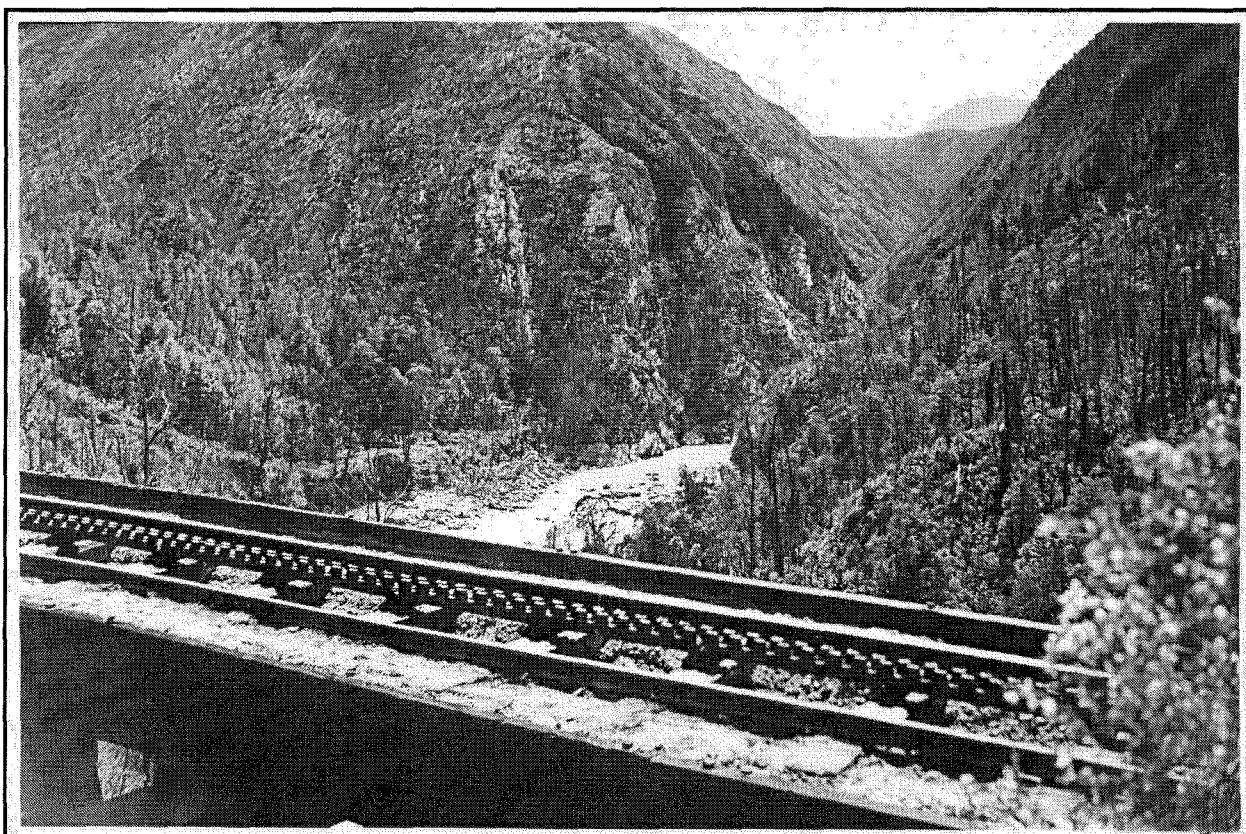
<sup>14</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>15</sup> *Mercury*, 14 February 1896.

<sup>16</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 29 August 1893, p. 1588.



DUBS No. 1 ABT SYSTEM LOCOMOTIVE



ABT 1 in 20 GRADE AND KING RIVER GORGE – c. 1930



Germany and for the Puerto Cabello Railway in South America. He preferred the Abt System because ‘the Fell is in principle dependent upon adhesion, and there is a certain amount of slip.’<sup>18</sup> Supporting Cutten, the government’s Engineer-in-Chief, James Fincham, proffered the advice provided to him by Napier Bell, the eminent New Zealand engineer. Bell had previously recommended the use of the Abt System on the Midland Railway in New Zealand because it would shorten the railway’s length and save money on building tunnels. As to his personal knowledge on the railways, Fincham admitted ‘I have no personal experience of the Abt system, and there are not many in Australia who have. All our information, of course, is from engineering literature.’<sup>19</sup> Bell did not prefer the Fell System, which had been employed at Rimutaka in New Zealand since 1878, due to its inability to safely handle heavy loads.<sup>20</sup>

The Abt System was designed in 1882 by Dr Roman Abt, a Swiss engineer. It had been first employed in 1885 on the Harzbahn railway in Germany. It featured a middle rail, known as the “rack rail,” which was raised five inches above the outside conventional rails. The Mount Lyell Company’s “rack rail” comprised two parallel bars, slightly spaced, with the teeth offset to ensure continuous engagement by the cogged pinion wheels that were fitted to the specially adapted Abt locomotives. A third bar had been employed on some overseas railways but Roman Abt considered that two were adequate and would prove less costly to install and maintain. Upon engaging the Abt System, the engine’s cogged pinion wheel, driven by the rack cylinders, provided a greatly increased tractive effort, with the engine effectively able to haul itself up the inclines. The rack then acted as a braking system on the downhill run. The Abt System offered greater versatility than the Fell System, which had been patented in 1866, in that the locomotives could be used over the rack rails and conventional adhesive lines. The Fell engines featured a centre rail friction drive comprising two sets of wheels rotating about a vertical axis, clamped onto the double-sided centre rail.<sup>21</sup>

The Select Committee duly recommended the Abt or Fell Systems to Parliament, which incorporated the necessary amendments in *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1893*. To ensure the railway operated efficiently, the Act required a speed of four

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<sup>17</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1893, p. 5, Queenstown.

<sup>18</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> C. Napier Bell, Report to the Chairman of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company on the Routes Surveyed for the Mt. Lyell Railway, 8 December 1893, Non State Records (NS) 726/17, p. 13, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>21</sup> D Jehan, *Rack Railways of Australia*, Sydney, D Jehan, 1997, p. 10.

miles an hour over the rack sections. On the conventional sections, the speed requirement was twelve miles an hour. The Abt System was the preferred choice from the outset, although critics of the railway alleged Cutten had recommended its use following the payment of an inducement by the German firm Rinecker, Abt & Co.<sup>22</sup> Cutten's preference for the Abt was clear-cut. He considered it to be absolutely safe when descending the steepest inclines as it was impossible for engines to slip on the rack sections. Cutten's choice was supported by Frederick Back, Manager of the Tasmanian Government Railways, who had advised the Select Committee that the Fell System suffered in comparison with the Abt, both from cost and operational perspectives.<sup>23</sup>

The Company's decision to adopt the King River was openly condemned. Two of the Company's surveyors, Messers Sale and De Mole, were dismissed for opposing the route.<sup>24</sup> The dissent quickly spread among shareholders. The Company defended its decision. The proposed line was shorter than the Tully route, would cost £40,000 less to construct and offered greater working efficiencies. Because the heavy gradients were all concentrated at one point, heavy loads could be split over the short section. Cutten argued that a line from the west 'would be rather dangerous to work, owing to the immense number of steep gradients of 1 in 33, sharp curves, high viaducts, and short tunnels. This line would have been terribly severe to work, especially in such a moist country; it would be difficult to get engines to haul by pure adhesion.'<sup>25</sup> Fincham supported the Company's amendments to the legislation, advising the Select Committee that 'if the line is carried out on the system proposed, it will be an inestimable boon for the country, and will show what can be done in surmounting cheaply the very severe physical features in the Colony.'<sup>26</sup>

The ongoing criticism of the route was widely reported and did not assist the Company's chances of raising finance in England. Company Director, William Knox, observed that to secure the support of men of standing in London 'you must satisfy them as to all the material facts of the enterprise, and one of the most vital points in this case was the cost of constructing a railway from the mine to the Tasmanian seaboard.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, pp. 9-11.

<sup>24</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893, paper 96, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 January 1894.

Hoping to dispel the criticism, the Company employed Napier Bell to re-examine the various railway alternatives. Bell was experienced in railway construction matters and possessed a good knowledge of Macquarie Harbour and its environs, having visited the area three years earlier to advise government on the harbour entrance problems. He arrived in Strahan towards the end of October 1893.<sup>28</sup>

With Cutten's assistance, Bell thoroughly inspected the four alternate routes. He considered the Tully Route most unsuitable. The terrain was exceedingly rough and covered steep grades, and would require a continual succession of four-chain curves and the construction of many viaducts over the steep ravines and gullies. Bell concluded the "Road Route" to be equally impractical. It would require a number of steep hauls, a quarter mile tunnel and would need to employ the Abt System on the downhill section into Lynchford. Bell was initially concerned at the steep nature of the country over which Cutten proposed to lay the Abt System. He preferred taking the railway through the King River Gorge as it offered easy grades all the way through to Queenstown. In his diplomatically-worded report to the Company's Directors, Bell stated:

As Mr Cutten found it too costly, if not impossible, to carry the line through the Gorge of the King on account of steep sides and precipices, he has carried it up a creek, over a saddle at a height of 764 feet above sea level, and down another creek into the valley of the Queen River...This is unfortunate, because if the line could have been taken through the gorge Mount Lyell would have been reached with easy locomotive gradients...The cost from the lower end of the Abt incline over the Saddle and on to the Queen Hotel is estimated from the plans at £38,000. It would therefore cost £30,000 extra to go through the Gorge. But the advantages gained would be very considerable, and if it had been a Government line I should certainly advise that the line be taken through the Gorge.<sup>29</sup>

Bell compared the viability of the two King River options based on the anticipated freight movements of 67,200 tons per annum. He considered the more expensive King River Gorge route would prove the more favourable option should the projected loads double. Bell's report provided comfort to the directors of the temporarily cash strapped Company. He considered the rock to be extremely hard along the steeper slopes of the King River and over the Abt sections, as a consequence there would be little chance of landslides. Aside from the path through the Gorge, the line was two miles shorter than the Tully route, one mile shorter than the Road route, had longer stretches of easier grades, had less height to climb and would be cheaper to build. Bell saw merit in the choice of Pine Cove as the port, but wisely advised the Company to consider building a line around the shore to East Strahan to connect with the government rail system. The

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<sup>28</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 October 1893.

<sup>29</sup> C. Napier Bell, Report to the Chairman of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company on the Routes Surveyed for the Mt. Lyell Railway, 8 December 1893, NS 726/17, pp.7-8, AOT.

Directors welcomed Bell's endorsement of Cutten's choice of the King River route and heeded his advice by proceeding to survey the line into Strahan 'in case it should be found desirable to make Strahan the Port terminus.'<sup>30</sup>

The full contents of Bell's 8 December 1893 report were not made public, but selected excerpts were quoted in Company reports and newspaper releases. While Bell did endorse the King River route, he was not totally supportive of the Company's short-term plans. These he observed to be based on financial and not engineering priorities. He was less than convinced that the temporary port of Teepookana, on the King River, would be a sound proposition. Bell advised the Chairman: 'In my opinion there is nothing to be gained by attempting to use the lower parts of the river; I think it would be found unsatisfactory, and your traffic might be subject to risks and delays which would add to the cost and hamper your operations at the Mine.'<sup>31</sup>

The Company did Bell an injustice by not releasing his full report. His engineering expertise was strongly questioned, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* claiming the shareholders' money had been thrown away. On the King River route, the paper advised:

The true state of affairs lies in the fact that the King River route is impracticable unless at an enormous sacrifice of money. A railway can only be built at ruinous expense in that particular country; the country is rotten and difficult, and when the line is completed it cannot be reckoned safe [with] the next shower, and the terrible expense goes on for ever.<sup>32</sup>

Bell was confident the hard local rock would accommodate the railway and, in the very worst areas, where it might be dangerous to touch the cliffs and bluffs, the line could either pass around these obstacles or timber trestle bridges could be used to great effect.<sup>33</sup> While Bell's explanation may have appeased local concerns, it did not comfort an embittered James Crotty. He considered that a conventional railway could be built between the mine and Kelly Basin, on Macquarie Harbour, by keeping to the eastern side of the West Coast Mountain Range. Several years later, as Crotty's dream of developing his North Mount Lyell enterprise materialised, he again orchestrated a barrage of criticism against the Mount Lyell Company's directors and its ill-chosen railway. He maintained the vendetta up until his death on 16 April 1898. Crotty was 'tenacious of his opinion, generous to a fault, and a warm friend, though stubborn

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<sup>30</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1894, p. 8, Queenstown.

<sup>31</sup> C. Napier Bell, Report to the Chairman of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company on the Routes Surveyed for the Mt. Lyell Railway, 8 December 1893, NS 726/17, p. 19, AOT.

<sup>32</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 February 1894.

<sup>33</sup> JPPP, Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1894, paper 59, p. 10.

enemy.<sup>34</sup> He manipulated articles in the locally-produced *Mount Lyell Standard* and sold the virtues of his own ventures to unsuspecting overseas investors by influencing the editorials of influential British mining journals.<sup>35</sup>

The London based *Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette* was particularly critical of the Mount Lyell railway, advising its readers: 'From beginning to end the existing Mount Lyell Railway is a blunder...therefore, we recommend the shareholders to grapple with the blunder committed while the mine is in a progressive state.'<sup>36</sup> The same journal also published a series of scurrilous letters penned by EM Tudor-Boddam, a retired captain of the Hobart shore batteries. Exaggerating the Mount Lyell Company's operational costs, and roundly criticising its directors and professional experts, Tudor-Boddam extolled the virtues of the North Mount Lyell Company's. On the Mount Lyell railway, Tudor-Boddam warned:

They have got a railway, which promises (in the opinion of the engineer who surveyed the line, and the very capable contractor who built it) to disappear before long into the King River. It necessitates enormous cost to work on account of the heavy gradients, and it has a far too limited capacity for haulage; it requires six or seven handlings of material during transit (for it does not nearly reach or go to the right side of the range on which the mine lies), and leads only to a partially and occasionally navigable river, with only from 2 to 3 feet of water on the bar; it costs an enormous sum of money to construct, and now the directors see all hopes of future traffic blown to the winds by the new railway being constructed to Macquarie Harbour by the North Mount Lyell Company, who will be able to compete and carry the whole traffic to deep water without rehandling or transfer at one quarter of the cost.<sup>37</sup>

The completion of Bell's report coincided with William Knox's return from England, his attempts to raise capital for the railway and associated works having failed miserably. The Company's inability to begin construction caused general frustration on the West Coast, particularly for the men waiting to be employed.<sup>38</sup> The situation was monitored in Strahan, as many businesses and local speculators had purchased land at East Strahan, hoping the terminus would be in Strahan and not at Pine Cove.<sup>39</sup> Surveys of the line through to Pine Cove were completed in early April,<sup>40</sup> and the alternate route to Strahan on 27 June 1894.<sup>41</sup> Work on clearing the four miles of formation between the smelters site and Lynchford commenced in June the same year.<sup>42</sup>

Hoping to resolve financial impasse, the Company approached government to obtain a guarantee for the £150,000 of debenture stock it planned to issue to raise funds

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<sup>34</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 20 April 1898.

<sup>35</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 108-111.

<sup>36</sup> *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 14 August 1897.

<sup>37</sup> *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 13 November 1897.

<sup>38</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 22 March 1894.

<sup>39</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 3 April 1894.

<sup>40</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 7 April 1894.

<sup>41</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 29 June 1894.

for the construction of the railway. Despite support from the Select Committee, the Bill was rejected by Parliament on 12 June 1894 as it was considered inappropriate that government should accept the risk on behalf of a private company.<sup>43</sup> Alternate transport solutions were considered. A year earlier mining expert Alexander Allan proposed erecting an aerial ropeway between Mount Lyell and Strahan.<sup>44</sup> Other similarly impracticable ideas were raised and rejected during the period June to August, including a horse drawn tramway and building a thirty chain tunnel under the ridge from Sailor Jack's Creek to the other side of the King River Gorge. The preference for the Abt railway prevailed. The directors were hell-bent on building the railway. They were 'fired with wild optimism by their fabulous luck at Broken Hill, they vested the same rugged, illogical faith in Mount Lyell...they believed that Mount Lyell would become an equally rich mining field, yielding huge profits for a railway that tapped it.'<sup>45</sup>

Optimism and sheer luck were to play important roles in advancing the fortunes of the Mount Lyell Company. Early in 1893, when Edward Peters was completing his report on Mount Lyell, a small seam of rich argentiferous copper ore had been discovered in the South Drive of its Number 4 Tunnel, at the Iron Blow. Assays revealed between 1,500 to 2,000 ounces of silver to the ton, 3 deadweights of gold and a 26 per cent copper content.<sup>46</sup> The seam proved to be larger than first expected and by 23 May 1895, when nearly exhausted, the 881 tons of argentiferous ore mined had yielded 880,626 ounces of silver and 181 tons of copper.<sup>47</sup> Despite having to pay high shipping rates and offshore smelting costs, the returns from the windfall deposit yielded £106,000 in net profit. The unexpected return enabled the Company to remain solvent over the two and a half year period it had unsuccessfully attempted to raise capital.<sup>48</sup>

Wisely, the directors used the balance of the money raised from the sale of the silver to fund the delayed capital works. In his 29 November 1894 report to shareholders, Bowes Kelly advised 'sufficient money will be provided for proceeding with the gradual construction of the Railway, and at the same time leave sufficient funds

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<sup>42</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 11 July 1894.

<sup>43</sup> The Select Committee report, dated 5 June 1894, had endorsed the Company's request to guarantee the debentures (paper 59 of 1894). The Bill, cited as 'The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's Debentures Act,' was lost on division on the 12 June second reading.

<sup>44</sup> TA Allen's report to the Directors on the Property of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, 9 May 1893, p. 33, NS 1711/854, AOT.

<sup>45</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>46</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1893, pp. 9-10, Queenstown.

<sup>47</sup> Figures obtained from the MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-years ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1893 (p. 3), 31<sup>st</sup> March 1894 (pp. 6 & 7), 30<sup>th</sup> September 1894 (p.7) and 31<sup>st</sup> March 1895 (p. 6), Queenstown.

<sup>48</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 67.

in hand to admit of the immediate erection of Reduction Plants, Development of the Mine and other necessary local work.’<sup>49</sup> Forced to ignore Bell’s earlier advice, the Company decided to construct the railway only as far as “The Bar Rock,”<sup>50</sup> which was the highest navigable point on the King River. The temporary port was located fourteen and a half miles from the smelters and eight and a half miles from Strahan. The Directors believed the temporary port would meet the Company’s immediate requirements and the railway could be completed once the treatment of the ore was sufficiently profitable.<sup>51</sup>

The choice for the route finally settled, and finance for the first section of the railway assured, the next task was to proceed to construction.

### **Railway Construction in the Wilderness**

Building the railway presented many challenges. This section examines the difficulties experienced by the contractors, engineers and navvies amid the isolated wilderness, and the innovative engineering feats that made the railway unique to Australia. The Mount Lyell Company commenced the project by avoiding the normal practice of letting the construction works to a single major contractor. Instead, it chose to call tenders for the clearing and construction contracts in short sections. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* fully supported the fresh approach, recalling the bitter memories of how Zeehan’s general welfare and progress had suffered greatly at the hands of Reynolds and Co, the Strahan to Zeehan railway contractors. The paper envisaged the Company’s ploy would eliminate the expensive middleman and provide an immediate and untrammelled connection between real employers and the real employese. It contended the practice would make it possible ‘for co-operative parties who have practically no capital but muscle and sinew to tender.’<sup>52</sup>

The Company called tenders for the construction of the three mile sixty chain section between its smelters site and the Lynchford road crossing in September 1894,<sup>53</sup> and the four mile thirty-two chain Teepookana to Dubbil Barril portion the following month.<sup>54</sup> The latter tender was awarded on 28 November 1894 to a Melbourne contracting firm, Garnsworthy and Smith, for £22,403 8s.7d. Construction

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<sup>49</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1894, pp. 6-7, Queenstown.

<sup>50</sup> This site was later named Teepookana by the Company’s engineer, Charles Wordsworth James.

<sup>51</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1894, Queenstown.

<sup>52</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 September 1894.

<sup>53</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 September 1894.

<sup>54</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 October 1894.

of the three feet six inch gauge railway commenced on 10 December 1894.<sup>55</sup> Work on the line to Lynchford did not proceed through the lack of a suitable response. However, the Company chose to begin construction on a short length of line closer to the smelters, employing day labour for the task. These works were supervised by the Company's Superintending Engineer, E. Carus Drifffield, who was involved with the construction of the haulage line between the Iron Blow and the two feet gauge tramway system, built to service the smelters.<sup>56</sup>

The start of railway construction ended two years of frustration and delays. The expectation that the contractors would employ out of work Tasmanians was misplaced; instead they hired 200 men from the mainland. Many were lured to the West Coast through the lack of work at home and, so were willing to work at the cutthroat rate of five and six shillings a day. The men were viewed as sweatshop laborers. Their arrival created great bitterness amongst the locals who saw their expectations of employment 'usurped by specially imported labor, and the bread taken out of their mouths and those of their wives and children by the unfortunates of another country.'<sup>57</sup> John Garnsworthy defended his decision, advising that he had employed the majority of hands from Melbourne because he 'found Tasmanians were not equal in knowledge of railway construction to the Victorians.'<sup>58</sup>

The labour issue festered for some months. Life for the new arrivals became progressively harder, the high cost of living on the West Coast catching many unaware. Luckily, December to March was exceptionally dry, enabling construction works to proceed without undue interruption. The low water levels in the King River greatly assisted the construction of both the wharf at Teepookana and the "Quarter Mile Bridge,"<sup>59</sup> which was located a mile and a quarter further upstream. Enthused by the progress, the Company's Engineer-in-Charge, Frederick Cutten, reported in April 1895 'the earthworks generally on this line have turned out exceedingly well, not only for the contractor but for the Company, the material being exceedingly easy to move, and at the same time standing thoroughly well at steep angles.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1895, p. 25, Queenstown.

<sup>56</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1895, pp. 16-18, & 25, Queenstown.

<sup>57</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 January 1895.

<sup>58</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 16 November 1895.

<sup>59</sup> The bridge was 800 feet long but attracted the name "Quarter Mile Bridge" for the life of the railway.

<sup>60</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1895, p. 26, Queenstown.



Working conditions in the rainforest deteriorated markedly with the onset of winter, the contractors and navvies experiencing extremes in the West Coast climate. Reporting on the deplorable living conditions at a bridge construction camp, Reverend Frederick Copeland painted a gloomy picture:

You never saw such a place for men to live. They had built up barricades of wood round their tents to keep out the liquid mud which was from two to three feet deep everywhere. Most of the men had been out working during the whole of this awful day. Talk about cruelty to animals!<sup>61</sup>

Contractor John Garnsworthy was equally unimpressed with the terrain, providing the following insight into the difficulties he encountered:

The best description possible is to call it one continuation of precipices and gullies...the scrub is what they call by the name of horizontal. There is no such thing as vegetation, and an animal could not live there, let alone walk about. Only such a thing as a monkey could get round some of those spurs leading to the river. The country gave you the impression that nature had frowned, and forgotten to smooth out the wrinkles and points on its face afterwards.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from the physical deprivations caused by the heavy rains, the men lost pay through their inability to labour in the torrential downpours. Frustrated with working for little more than “tucker” wages, the navvies met on 1 July 1895 to discuss their poor rates and dismal working conditions. In a unanimous decision the men resolved to seek an increase in pay to seven shillings a day. The contractors refused the claim and the men went on strike. The contractors faced a number of dilemmas. They had fallen behind schedule with the construction program and their low profit margin gave them little room to manoeuvre. It was unlikely that replacement workers willing to accept such poor conditions would be found. Labour organisations statewide rallied to prevent labour being sent to break the strike. Public sympathy was widespread for the workers, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* proclaiming ‘a navvy’s occupation in the Mount Lyell district during such weather as we have had of late touches about the last degree of misery, and his lot is not one to be envied.’<sup>63</sup>

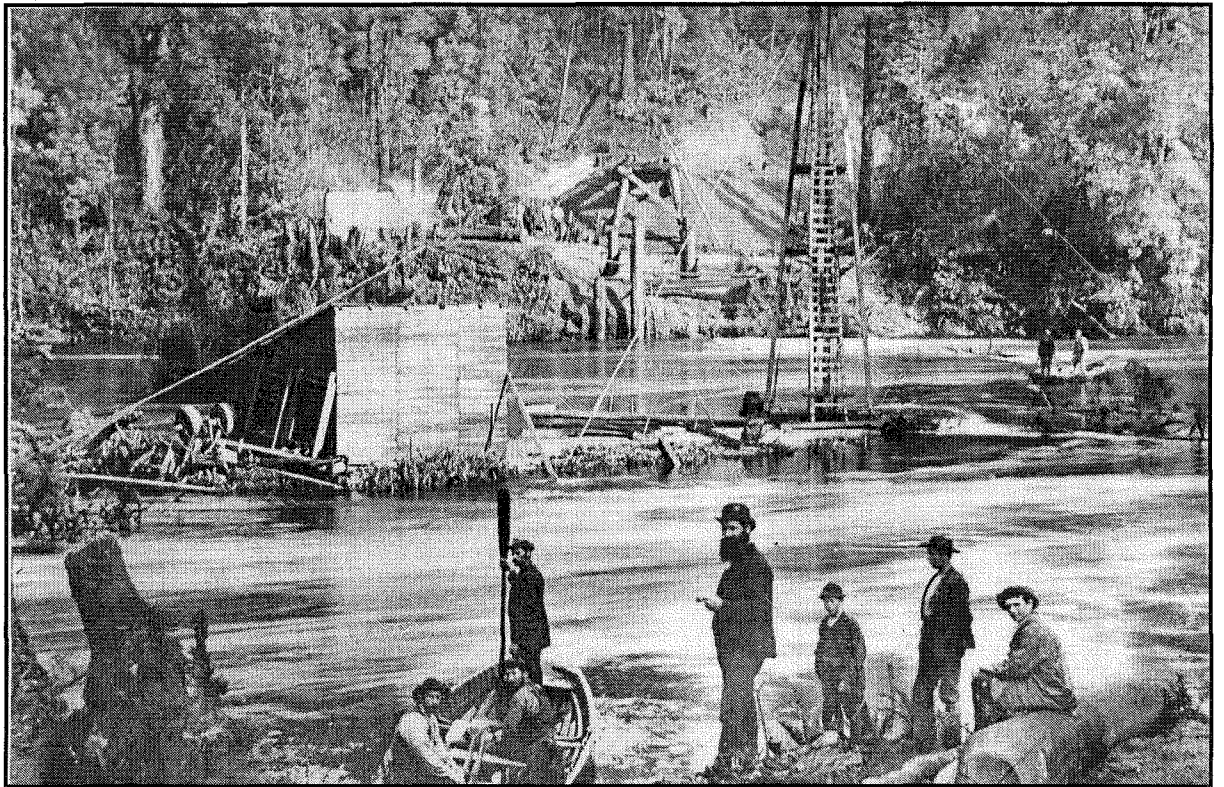
Accepting the futility of the situation, the contractors sought a compromise. Their 3 July offer of 6s.6d. for an eight hour day and 7s.3d. for a nine hour day was accepted by the strikers.<sup>64</sup> The Company had been anxious to see the matter resolved as it could ill-afford yet another criticism of its railway. Cutten considered the section built by Garnsworthy and Smith to be the key to the whole line. It was by far the roughest section as it involved heavy cuttings, deep banks, and considerable bridge-work. The

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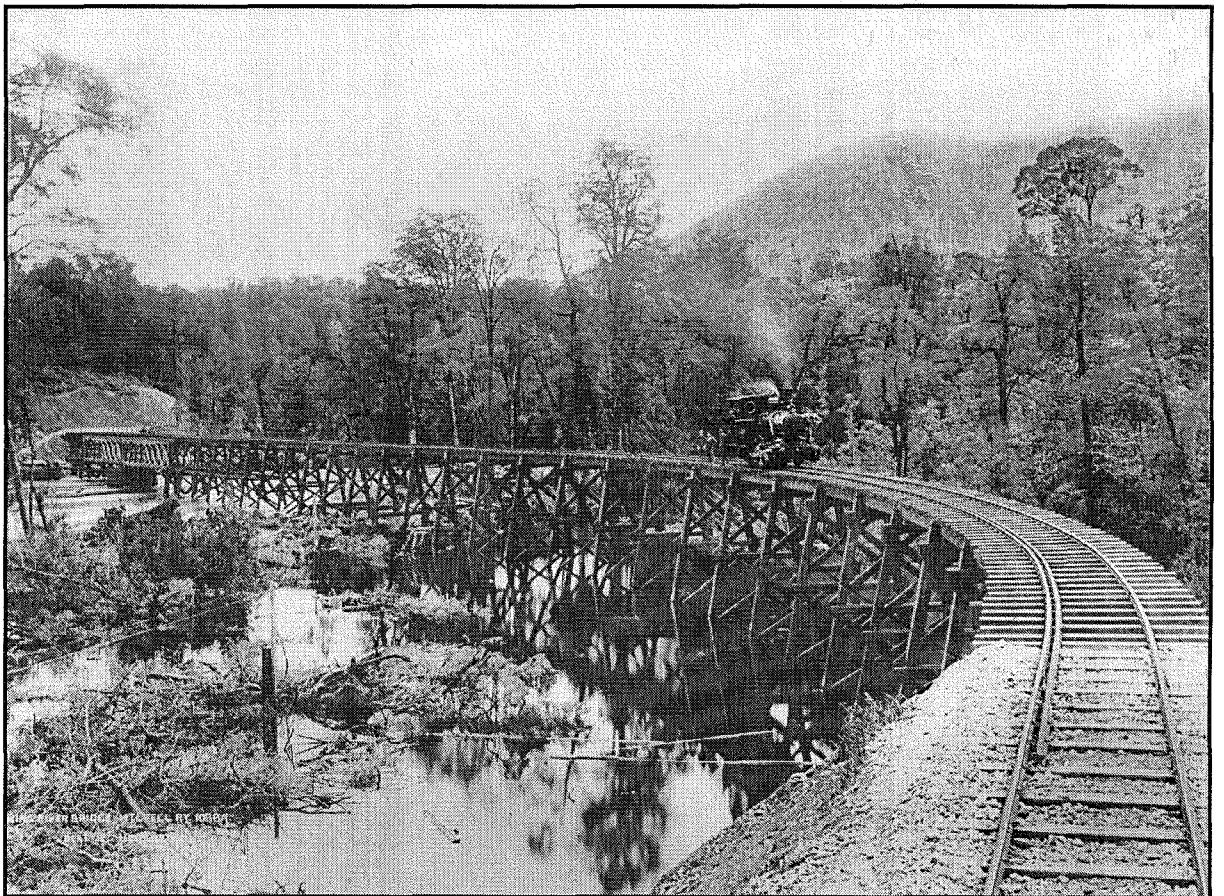
<sup>61</sup> FG Copeland, *In the Wild, Wet, West of Tasmania; Stories of Zeehan and the West Coast of Tasmania during the 1890's*, Accounts written 1894-1901, compiled by John Copeland, Adelaide, 1998, p. 43.

<sup>62</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 16 November 1895.

<sup>63</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 July 1895.



**CONSTRUCTION 'QUARTER MILE BRIDGE' c. 1895**



**QUARTER MILE BRIDGE AND ABT LOCOMOTIVE – c. 1897**

longest was the Quarter Mile bridge which was 800 feet long and averaging 35 feet in height.<sup>65</sup> The three month delay in completing the contract had been caused by the difficulty in locating the foundations for the Quarter Mile Bridge across the King River. It had been anticipated that a solid base would be located fifteen feet below the surface. However, the piles had to be driven between fifty and sixty feet for a secure footing. Timber for the long piles was obtained from the Gordon River area.<sup>66</sup> Forced to absorb this unexpected expense, John Garnsworthy labelled the bridge “Hell’s Gate.” The King River also invoked his wrath, his workers smashing two boats in one day moving the sixty feet long piles over the rapids.<sup>67</sup>

Hoping to expedite works, the Company had called tenders in April 1895 for two further sections of the railway. These included the four miles and eighteen chains of Abt grades between Dubbil Barril and Hall’s Creek and the two miles twenty-seven chains length between Hall’s Creek and Lynchford. Acutely aware of its limited budget, the Company rejected the two responses it received and promptly appointed Carus Driffield to supervise the works and employ day laborers for the task.<sup>68</sup> The contract for the construction of the final three mile sixty chain length, that from Lynchford, north along the Queen River Valley towards the smelters, was let for £3,010 on 1 November 1895 to Messers Gaffney and Harvey of Strahan. Works on the sections commenced simultaneously on 7 November.<sup>69</sup> The magnitude of the Company’s undertaking was considered by the *Argus* to be a first in Australasia, the paper predicting the railway would become a very valuable asset.<sup>70</sup>

During construction the Company continued to incorporate innovative changes to the railway’s alignment, particularly over the Abt sections, where it avoided the construction of twenty bridges by increasing the number of cuttings and embankments.<sup>71</sup> The two and three quarter mile climb out of the King River Valley, between Dubbil Barril and Rinadeena, had a maximum 1 in 20 grade. The one and a half mile downhill section from Rinadeena to Halls Creek, located within the confines of the Queen River Valley, was shorter but steeper, with a maximum 1 in 16 grade. By

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<sup>64</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 July 1895.

<sup>65</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, pp. 21-22, Queenstown.

<sup>66</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>67</sup> *Williamstown Chronicle*, 16 November 1895.

<sup>68</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, pp. 7 & 21, Queenstown.

<sup>69</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1896, pp. 27-28, Queenstown.

<sup>70</sup> *Argus*, 12 November 1895.

revising his original engineering plans, Cutten lessened the intended grade from 1 in 13 on the latter section, at the expense of adding an extra quarter mile to the Abt climb. This minor reduction in gradient increased the load capacity of this length of line and improved the overall efficiency of the railway.<sup>72</sup>

The inclement weather failed to deter progress, Driffield accomplishing double the work of that attained by Garnsworthy and Smith in less than half the time.<sup>73</sup> The completion of the line into Queenstown on 18 July 1896 was an auspicious occasion. A relieved Robert Sticht reported that the first through train from Teepookana arrived at one o'clock and 'Mr Driffield considerably brought one truckload of coke with him.'<sup>74</sup> The laying of the rack rails was delayed until the arrival of the Abt locomotive from Scotland. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* was impressed by the railway works, which it considered would rank as one of the most important tasks in the overall works program. The paper reported that the Company could now have its 'machinery material and coke delivered at Queenstown at about one-fourth of what it has hitherto cost to bring it up by road.'<sup>75</sup> The completion of the fifteen mile railway between Teepookana and the smelters in a mere nineteen months was a truly remarkable achievement. Commissioner Fowell, in his annual report on the Western Mining Division, acknowledged the Company's efforts and paid special tribute to 'the thorough and practical way in which the Mount Lyell Company have carried out their work.'<sup>76</sup>

The Company faced compliance problems arising from the requirements of its enabling legislation. Under the terms of *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act*, the railway was to have been built to a point in or near the Town of Strahan within a period of four years, the prescribed date being 21 December 1896. The existing terminus at Teepookana was approximately one and a half miles from the Strahan town boundary and four miles shy of the proposed port at Pine Cove. In presenting evidence to the Select Committee, Carus Driffield reiterated that Teepookana had been chosen strictly for financial reasons. The Company's earlier financial difficulties and overwhelming desire to obtain early communication with the mine had forced it to economise. By choosing Teepookana the railway and reduction works had been completed nine months

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<sup>71</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1896, pp. 28-29, Queenstown.

<sup>72</sup> C. Napier Bell, Report to the Chairman of the Mount Lyell Gold Mining Company on the Routes Surveyed for the Mt. Lyell Railway, 8 December 1893, pp. 13-14, NS 726/17, AOT.

<sup>73</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 May 1896.

<sup>74</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 24 July 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 2, NS 1711/310, p. 631, AOT.

<sup>75</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 July 1896.

<sup>76</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for 1895-6: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines, &c., 1896, paper 60, p. 14.

in advance. A savings of £21,600 had been achieved by not extending to Pine Cove and £35,100 by not running into Strahan.<sup>77</sup> After due deliberation, the Committee endorsed the Company's request. The *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1896* provided a further five years for the line to be extended to a terminus in or near the Town of Strahan. Bowes Kelly expressed his pleasure at the outcome and the great benefits of reduced freight costs and the improved delivery times provided by the railway.<sup>78</sup>

The final challenge for the controversial railway involved the untried Abt System. The first of five Abt engines<sup>79</sup> arrived from Glasgow on 27 August 1896. The locomotive was reassembled under the supervision of Mr Lowe, who had been sent out from Scotland for the task.<sup>80</sup> The first trials occurred in early September at the construction village of Camp Spur, located between Teepookana and Dubbil Barril. The engine ran over the several chains of temporarily laid rack rail without incident.<sup>81</sup> The test completed, laying the rack rail up the 1 in 20 grade between Dubbil Barril and Rinadeena commenced on 7 September. By the end of the month the locomotive had worked over the first seventy chains of line without any hitches.<sup>82</sup> The laying of the rack rails progressed smoothly, the chore being slowed by the requirement for the "greatest exactness" and the need to keep the line open for traffic.<sup>83</sup>

Work on the Abt sections was completed on 9 November 1896. Driffield reported the Abt System and locomotive were working very efficiently, with little perceptible wear on either the locomotive's pinion wheels or on the rack bars. The implementation of the Abt System doubled the capacity of the railway. Importantly, operations were no longer affected by adverse weather conditions. A regular traffic timetable commenced on 21 December 1896. With the smelters increasing to full operation considerable demands were placed upon the newly completed railway. A commodious railway office and substantial goods shed were erected at Queenstown, the locomotive and rolling

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<sup>77</sup> JPPP, *Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1896*, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, paper 58, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1896, pp. 7 & 8, Queenstown.

<sup>79</sup> Between 1896 and 1938 five Abt locomotives were imported by the Company. The second Dubs and Co. locomotive, built in 1898, was shipped to Strahan aboard the *SS Grafton*, which foundered on the Macquarie Harbour Bar on 13 June 1898. As some of the motion gear from this locomotive could not be salvaged its trial run was delayed until 28 January 1899, after the arrival of replacement parts. The third Dubs and Co. locomotive, also built in 1898, was trialled in Queenstown on 25 February 1899 while the fourth Dubs and Co. engine, built in 1901, was successfully trialled on 11 October the same year. The fifth and final Abt locomotive purchased by the Mount Lyell Company was built by North British in 1938 and placed in service in July that year.

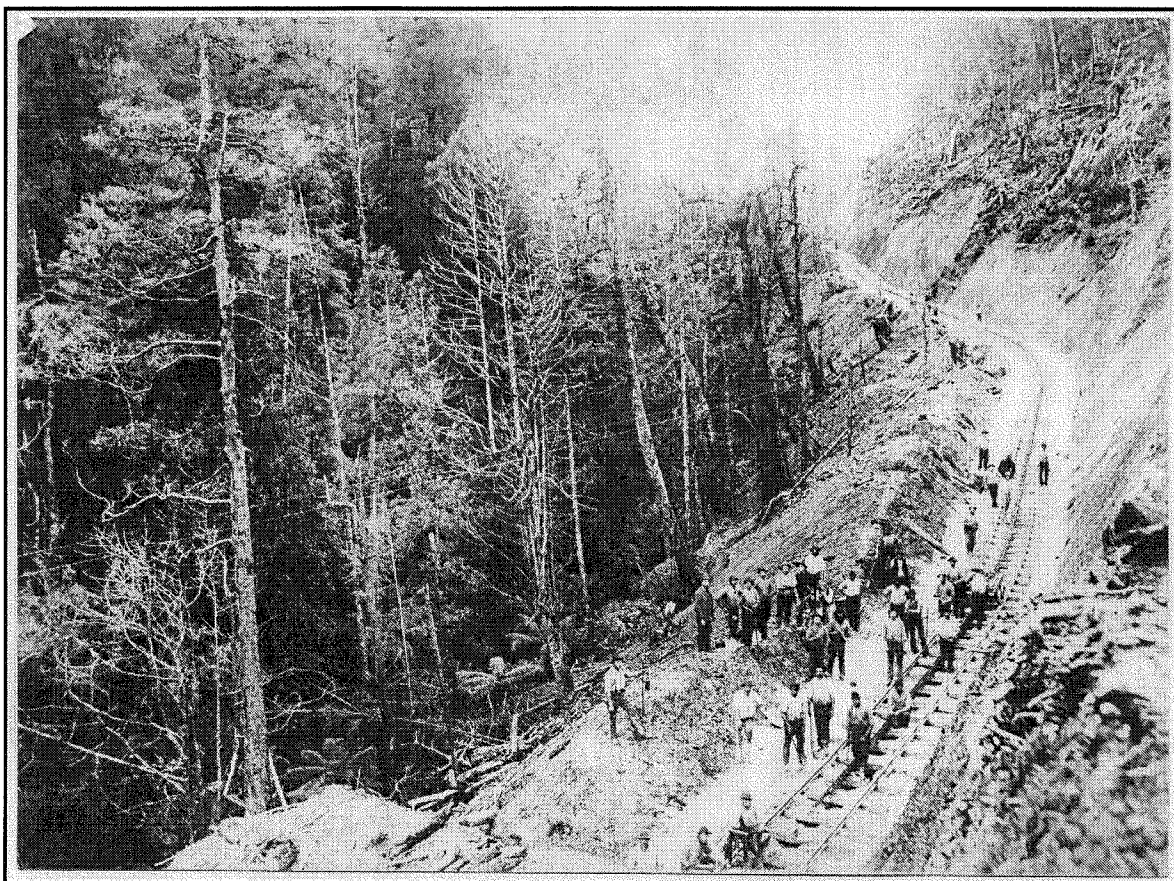
<sup>80</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 September 1896.

<sup>81</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 September 1896.

<sup>82</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1896, pp. 7 & 8, Queenstown.

<sup>83</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 September 1896.





**LAYING OF RACK RAIL ON ABT 1 in 20, DUBBIL BARRIL TO RINADEENA**



**CONSTRUCTION WORKS ON ABT RAILWAY, KING RIVER – c. 1896**

stock workshops were relocated from Camp Spur to the Company's new offices near the smelters and infrastructure was added at Teepookana to improve handling of the ever increasing freight over the busy wharf. Orders were placed for an additional Abt locomotive, new rolling stock and a passenger carriage for the main line. A powerful tank engine and hopper waggon were ordered for the smelter flux traffic.<sup>84</sup>

The commissioning of the first furnace in the Converter Plant on 14 January 1897 saw the Company begin regular production of blister copper ingots. On 5 February the first twenty-five tons of ingots were loaded on the train for transport to Teepookana. Robert Sticht delayed his daily chores to supervise the operation.<sup>85</sup> The *Mount Lyell Standard* observed the importance of the moment commenting that 'the event naturally caused a flutter of excitement, and no doubt when the bars arrive in Melbourne and are prominently displayed there, the shares in the Big Mine will make an appreciable move.'<sup>86</sup>

During the first six months of the railway's operation it returned a healthy net profit of £5,918 19s.5d., a healthy return on the £121,032 spent on construction and rolling stock.<sup>87</sup> The Company's fares and charges were regulated to prevent them exceeding those charged on the Strahan to Zeehan railway. The Company argued the requirement to be restrictive due to the extra costs incurred through the limitations in hauling freight over the Abt grades. It was not until the Company extended its railway to Regatta Point in 1900 that the matter was rectified. By-laws regulating the management and affairs of the Company were approved on 11 March 1897, a short time before the railway's official opening.<sup>88</sup>

The official opening of the Mount Lyell Company's operations at Queenstown was a moveable feast. Originally scheduled for Thursday 18 March 1897, the activities were reorganised to cater for the late arrivals of guests from Hobart aboard the *ss Australia*. By necessity, the impromptu festivities continued over the Thursday and Friday, when the contingent from Hobart finally sailed into Strahan. Activities concluded on the Saturday with a banquet at the Palace Hotel in Strahan. During the three days of festivities, the railway featured prominently. The official visitors, travelling between Teepookana and Queenstown, marvelled at the scenery witnessed

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<sup>84</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1897, pp. 29-31, Queenstown.

<sup>85</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 February 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 3, NS 1711/311, p. 368, AOT.

<sup>86</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 February 1897.

<sup>87</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1897, pp. 12 & 37, Queenstown.

<sup>88</sup> *The Hobart Gazette*, 16 March 1897, pp. 614-617.

along the line and the engineering skills that had enabled the railway to be constructed through such precipitous country.<sup>89</sup> Due to the hurried reorganisation of the events, the official opening of the railway was postponed until Monday 29 March 1897. The ceremony of driving the last spike was performed by Mrs Sticht in the Queenstown station area, who expressed her appreciation at the completion of 'this civilising factor - the railway.'<sup>90</sup>

Both the railway and the Dubs and Co. built locomotive proved resounding successes. Over the steepest 1 in 16 grade, the Abt engine could haul 60 tons in all weather conditions, the conventional adhesive locomotives being limited to 35 tons in dry conditions only. On the 1 in 20 section the load was increased to 75 tons, a vast improvement on the 45 tons hauled by the adhesive engine. The Abt engine was vastly superior. It delivered improved economies, an all-weather service and a safer means of transport. The railway was unique among railways built at the time in Australia. It featured forty-eight bridges, with an aggregate length of sixty-four chains, a little over five per cent of the entire length of the line. Over 400,000 cubic yards of material had been excavated during construction. A maximum of 450 workers was employed at any one time.<sup>91</sup> The railway boasted the deepest cutting in Tasmania, located near Hall's Creek on the 1 in 16 grade, being 400 feet long and 70 feet deep. It alone necessitated the removal of 25,000 cubic yards of material.<sup>92</sup> Accidents were infrequent, the two deaths having resulted from a land slippage at the 15-Mile camp near the Abt summit.<sup>93</sup> Bell's assessment of the generally stable character of the land proved correct. It was not until 7 September 1899 that the first minor slip occurred. Its effect was minimal. Sticht noted that after some three and a half years of operation, it was evident the earthworks along the line were of a stable nature.<sup>94</sup>

The innovative Abt System had proved successful over the short distance to Teepookana. It would only be a matter of time before the line was extended to Strahan and a through rail link established to the port of Burnie and beyond.

### **Extending Railway Boundaries and a Consolidation of Activities**

The first twelve months of operations proved to be very busy. The ongoing purchases of new engines and rolling stock, combined with improvements made to the

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<sup>89</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>90</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 April 1897.

<sup>91</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 March 1897.

<sup>92</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 November 1897.

<sup>93</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 March 1897.



railway's amenities and infrastructure, greatly assisted the handling of the growing passenger and freight traffic. The figures continued to rise during the second year. Sticht predicted that they would swell further with the extension to the Company's smelters and the rapid growth of population in the area.<sup>95</sup> The internal organisation of the Company's railway and tramway operations was reviewed during this period. Before 13 January 1898 the two-feet gauge tramway system, that supplied ore, limestone, silica and firewood to the smelters, had been managed by the Reduction Works. The amalgamation of the mainline and tramway operations provided greater efficiencies and further raised the profile of the Railway Department within the Company's structure.<sup>96</sup>

This section follows the Company's inevitable decision to extend its railway to Strahan and outlines the ongoing extensions to the railway networks that, on 21 December 1901, eventually delivered the Company and the travelling public access to the deepwater port of Burnie. This event not only further reduced the effects of isolation for the West Coast, it delivered the Mount Lyell Company with an alternate harbour outlet and the ability to negotiate advantageous tariffs with competing rail and shipping concerns. The operations of the railway are briefly discussed for the period through to 1935.

By November 1897 it was apparent that the railway and wharf facilities at Teepookana were inadequate. Sticht approved Driffield's request to increase the rolling stock and initiated a review of the costs to extend the railway to either Pine Cove or Strahan.<sup>97</sup> The following month Sticht instructed Driffield to progress the survey of the railway to Regatta Point and through to the terminus of the Strahan-Zeehan railway at the Strahan wharves. A new crossing of the King River, located closer to Teepookana, was also investigated. The idea of developing port facilities at Pine Cove was dismissed. Sticht advised his directors that 'the Company's business, both Smelting and otherwise, having grown to larger dimensions than was at first estimated, it is very likely that the facilities for wharve [sic] purposes &c at Pine Cove really would never be good enough.'<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> R Sticht report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 24 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 7, NS 1711/315, pp. 685-686, AOT.

<sup>95</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1898, p. 25, Queenstown.

<sup>96</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 17 January 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 6, NS 1711/314, p. 5, AOT.

<sup>97</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 6 November 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, pp. 551-552, AOT.

<sup>98</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 11 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, p. 813, AOT.

As railway traffic continued to grow, Teepookana's inefficiencies compounded. The Abt engine was virtually working around the clock and the wagons were being loaded twice a day. Sticht noted the railway was running its heavy traffic with only eighteen wagons, far less than the 108 used on the Strahan to Zeehan railway.<sup>99</sup> Apart from handling the copper exports, the railway carried increasing quantities of coke and coal to fuel the expanding smelting operations. Direct connection to a deepwater port was imperative. The cost of the extension to Regatta Point was estimated at less than £36,000, including the construction of the wharves and a steel bridge across the King River. By October 1898 the main line rolling stock had increased to seven locomotives and eighty vehicles. The Company's need for an efficient and reliable transport system was never more apparent than after the June 1898 wrecking of the *SS Grafton* on the Macquarie Bar. Lost at sea were the motion parts of the second Abt engine, which caused considerable inconvenience as the replacement parts from Scotland took nearly six months to arrive. Seeking to avoid further holdups, a third Abt engine was ordered.<sup>100</sup>

Soon after the loss of the *Grafton* a Select Committee was convened to determine freight charges and other matters appertaining to the railway's operation. On 7 September 1898, Parliament enacted *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1898*. The reasons for the Company's decision to abandon Pine Cove and to extend to Regatta Point were discussed in Chapter Three. The Company's directors were anxious to proceed with the works, advising Sticht by telegraph on 9 December that 'the Board desire you to take immediate steps - proceed extension of railway to Strahan with the utmost despatch - please advise.'<sup>101</sup> Sticht responded quickly. By the end of the month he had organised the delivery of the preliminary survey plans to government,<sup>102</sup> advertised the tender for the clearing works,<sup>103</sup> and announced JJ Gaffney as the successful applicant.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 31 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, pp. 901-902, AOT.

<sup>100</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1898, pp. 8-9, 28, Queenstown.

<sup>101</sup> Telegraph from Company Secretary to Sticht, 9 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 6, NS 1711/314, p. 850, AOT.

<sup>102</sup> R Sticht letter to Nicholas Brown MHA, 12 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 5, NS 1711/313, pp. 155-157, AOT.

<sup>103</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 December 1898.

<sup>104</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 December 1898.

Construction works were commenced at Regatta Point in the first week of the New Year.<sup>105</sup> This time the Company contracted out the construction works, preferring to use 400 day labourers supervised by Carus Driffield. After crossing the King River at Teepookana, the new route followed closely along the western banks of the river. Although traversing easy grades, sections of the line required the excavation of considerable amounts of heavy rock from the deep cuttings.<sup>106</sup> Experienced contractors, Duff Brothers of Hobart, won the contract to construct the wharf and sheds at Regatta Point.<sup>107</sup> Railway buildings at Regatta Point included a substantial goods shed, a commodious station building, locomotive running shed, turntable and two cottages.<sup>108</sup>

Eleven bridges were required on the new extension, the largest being the 140 feet single-span steel bridge at Teepookana. Weighing 108 tons, and manufactured by Westwood's of London, the bridge comprised ten panels each fourteen feet long. It arrived in sections in Strahan towards the end of June 1899 and was transported to Teepookana where it was assembled in the railway yards. A simple but relatively unconventional means of launching the reassembled bridge across the river was employed. Using a large 250 ton barge, bedecked with a trestle pier, the end of the bridge was launched onto the pier. Once secured, the barge was then towed across the river to the western abutment. Upon being manoeuvred into its final position, holes were bored into the barge until it sunk sufficiently for it to be withdrawn from under the newly-secured bridge. The operation was carried out in pouring rain on 29 September 1899, and was accomplished just before floodwaters swept down the river. The exercise was a noteworthy achievement and was thought to be the largest single span bridge launched in this manner in Tasmania.<sup>109</sup> The task occupied four days, the actual moving of the bridge taking one hour, the rest being taken up with the necessary preliminaries.<sup>110</sup>

The first copper ingots were railed through to Regatta Point on 20 October, before the official opening of the extension.<sup>111</sup> The formal ceremony for the seven and a half mile section was held at Regatta Point on 1 November 1899, the ceremony being performed by Mrs Sticht. The Abt locomotive used for the festivities carried a copper

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<sup>105</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 January 1899.

<sup>106</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1899, p. 31, Queenstown.

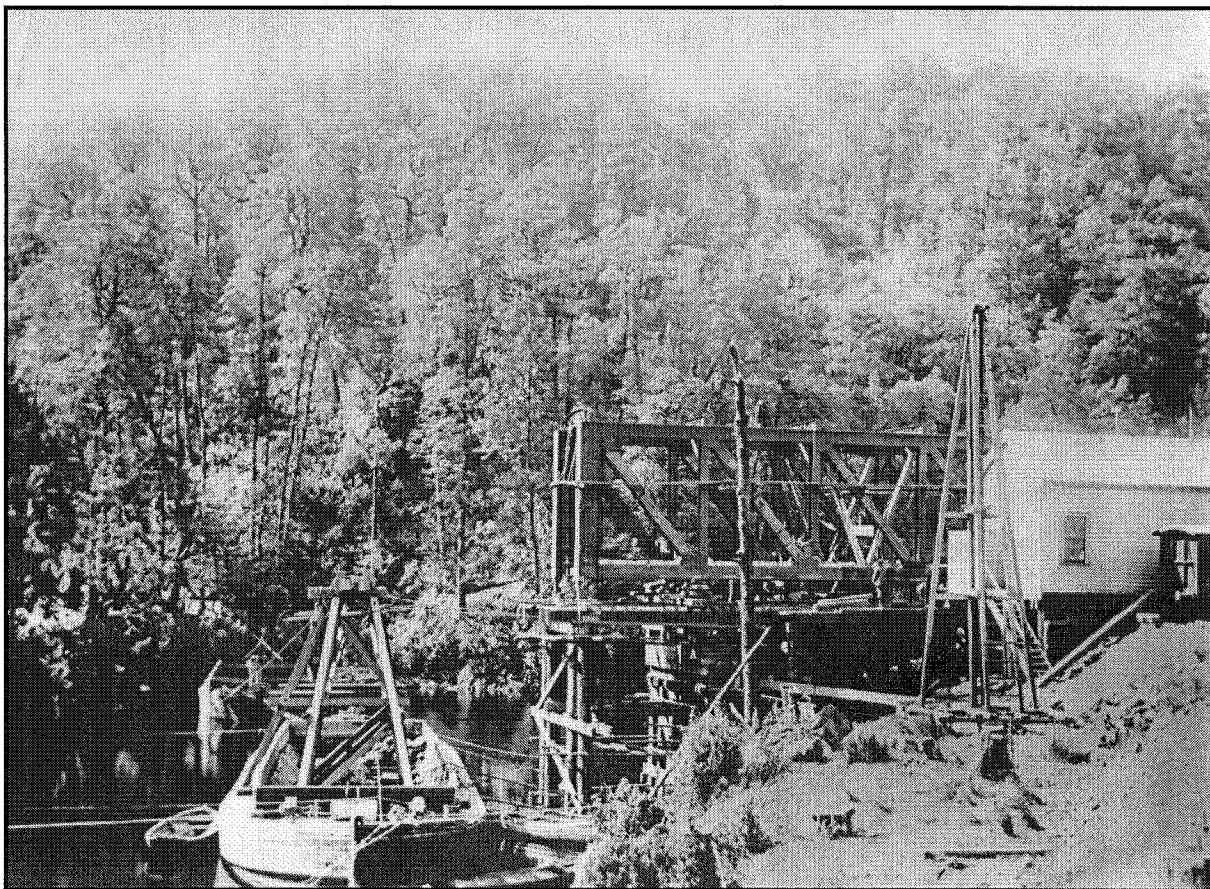
<sup>107</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 November 1899.

<sup>108</sup> C Driffield, Half-yearly report to General Manager, 1 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 7, NS 1711/315, pp. 697-698, AOT.

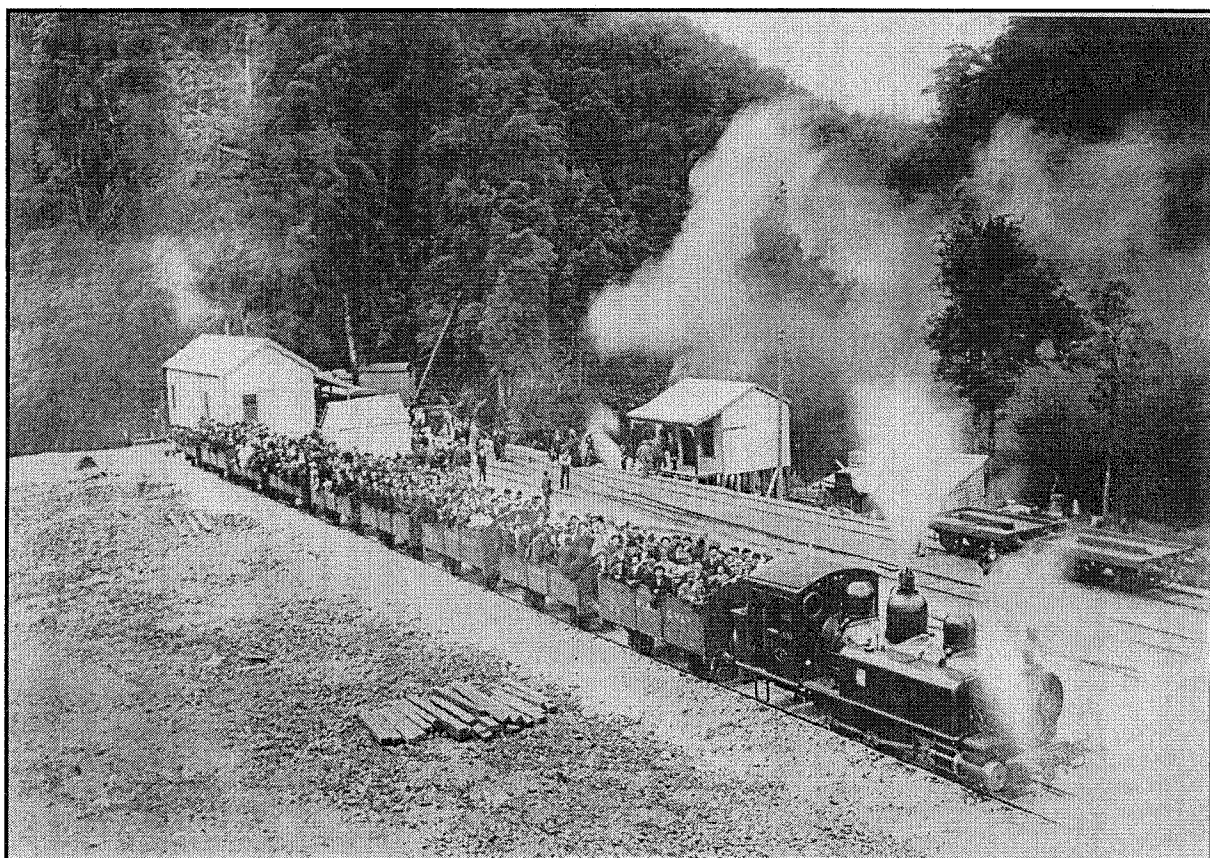
<sup>109</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 30 September 1899.

<sup>110</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30 September 1899, pp. 32-33, Queenstown.

<sup>111</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 21 October 1899.



**POSITIONING IRON BRIDGE AT TEEHOOKANA – SEPTEMBER 1899**



**FIRST MOUNT LYELL PICNIC, TEEHOOKANA – 5 DECEMBER 1897**

shield bearing two inscriptions “Labor Omnia Vincit” (translated – “labor conquers all”) and “We find a way or make it.” The *Zeehan Dundas Herald* considered these mottoes ‘were truly emblematical of that honest labor which, aided by capital, has brought about the methodical development of one of the world’s best mines.’<sup>112</sup> It was an important advent for the railway as it further lessened the Company’s isolation from its markets. Robert Sticht advised the Company’s Board that the railway would ‘greatly expedite and facilitate all inward and outward traffic, as compared with the facilities in use heretofore, and which involved slow and hazardous carriage by means of steam launches and lighters, between Strahan and Teepookana, via Macquarie Harbor and the King River, which latter is often in flood.’<sup>113</sup> On the day Sticht told the assembled throng that the event had been eagerly awaited since the inception of the Company and they had now ‘opened communication with the world.’<sup>114</sup>

Following the opening, activities at Teepookana were scaled down, the port being closed to all launch and lighter traffic a fortnight later.<sup>115</sup> Apart from facilitating freight movement for the Company, the newly-completed railway closed the gap between the Lyell and Strahan communities. Travel about the central West Coast area was soon to improve further. The government completed the construction of the vital mile long rail link between Regatta Point and the Strahan Wharf, the terminus of the Strahan-Zeehan line. The opening of this line attracted little fanfare, the first government train arriving at Regatta Point on the morning of 16 October 1900, in time to meet with the 10.15 am train from Queenstown.<sup>116</sup> Both the Company and the government agreed to grant reciprocal rights for the movement of rolling stock over their respective lines, creating efficiencies by removing the need to transship freight at Regatta Point.<sup>117</sup> From Zeehan, direct rail communication was available to Dundas and to Williamsford, the latter being over the government’s two feet gauge tramway that had opened two years earlier on 18 June 1898.<sup>118</sup>

The 21 December 1900 opening of the Emu Bay Railway, from Guildford Junction to Zeehan, was a momentous occasion. Through rail travel between

<sup>112</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 November 1899.

<sup>113</sup> R Sticht report to Chairman and Board of Directors, 24 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 7, NS 1711/315, p. 688, AOT.

<sup>114</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 November 1899.

<sup>115</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1900, p. 24, Queenstown.

<sup>116</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 October 1900.

<sup>117</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1900, p. 9, Queenstown.

<sup>118</sup> WA Bayley, *Railway Centenary in Tasmania*, NSW, self published, c. 1971, p. 60.

Queenstown and Burnie had been achieved.<sup>119</sup> The eighty-eight mile railway between Zeehan and Burnie provided direct contact with the mining towns of Rosebery and Waratah and, importantly, access to Burnie's deepwater port at Emu Bay. The extension had been built under controversial circumstances, the details of which are discussed later in this chapter. Within four months of completing the Emu Bay Railway, the government provided the West Coast communities with through rail access to the remainder of its Statewide network with the 15 April 1901 opening of the line between Burnie and Ulverstone.<sup>120</sup> The trip from Queenstown to Hobart was 365 miles and was generally preferred to the slog over the Linda Track and the potentially dangerous and time consuming trip by sea from Strahan. The ability to save money and time through the improved rail services was not lost on the Company's Vice-Chairman, William Knox, who reported to shareholders on 16 May 1901:

During the period [October to March] the Emu Bay Railway Company's line has been completed to Zeehan, thus giving in conjunction with our own and the Government lines through communication by rail from Queenstown to Hobart. Advantage is being taken of the through connection with Emu Bay for the transport of portion of our coke and coal requirements to the Reduction Works by rail, the whole of these materials having been formerly delivered by steamer at Strahan.<sup>121</sup>

The West Coasters had good reason to be thankful for their new-found freedom, although there were some problems with the rail service. The *Mount Lyell Standard* criticised the long waits between connections, the uncomfortable carriages on the Zeehan and Emu Bay lines and the considerable expense of a through ticket between Queenstown and Burnie. The paper observed that 'the Emu Bay Co has, by the completion of its line, conferred a boon upon the people of the West Coast, and it would be a pity if by the exercise of a rather ridiculous economy (ridiculous because altogether unbusinesslike) on the part of those in authority the company failed to reap the full benefits of its enterprise.'<sup>122</sup> The Port of Strahan would pay a heavy price for the new through rail system, as outlined in Chapter Three. For the Zeehan and Lyell communities, the railways provided ready access to Strahan's racecourse, picnic areas and beaches, enabling the visitors to escape their daily drudgery and 'abandon themselves to the frivolity of life.'<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 December 1900.

<sup>120</sup> Bayley, *Railway Centenary in Tasmania*, p. 61.

<sup>121</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901, p. 8, Queenstown.

<sup>122</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 18 January 1901.

<sup>123</sup> *The Banner*, 16 February 1901.

From the outset the Mount Lyell Company's diverse 3' 6" gauge railway operations had benefited a number of areas. Apart from its main line operations through to Regatta Point, the Company hauled a considerable quantity of local raw materials for use in the smelters and the mines. Conventional engines were used for this work. These included the two used to assist construction works and three Baldwin locomotives imported from America. The first arrived in June 1897,<sup>124</sup> the other two some twelve months later.<sup>125</sup> Apart from delivering flux from the nearby silica and limestone quarries, the engines hauled large volumes of saw logs, mine timber and firewood that was harvested from along the main line. Local freight hauled in 1897 totalled 17,760 tons, increasing to 37,209 tons in 1898, before peaking at 141,373 tons in 1899. It then fell to 117,283 tons in 1900 and again in 1901 to 99,914 tons.<sup>126</sup>

There were considerable fluctuations in traffic volumes between 1897 and 1935. Freight traffic carried on the main line peaked in 1899, with 194,819 tons carried. This figure was bolstered by the cartage of construction materials used on the extension of the railway to Regatta Point. Between 1904 and 1915, the annual volume of freight carried generally exceeded 90,000 tons, with a maximum of 125,651 tons achieved in 1909. The two aberrations to the figures followed extreme weather conditions. In the six months, 1 October 1905 to 31 March 1906, the driest period then on record, production figures fell and freight dropped to 50,018 tons.<sup>127</sup> From 1 April 1906 to 30 September 1906, the wettest six months then on record included the 15 April deluge that destroyed three railway bridges and damaged five others. The railway was temporarily closed until 4 May. Consequently, dry and wet extremes reduced the year's freight to 70,129 tons.<sup>128</sup>

Between 1915 and 1922 traffic declined for varying reasons. Demand for firewood fell after the commissioning of the Lake Margaret power station in November 1914.<sup>129</sup> This trend continued with the implementation of the electricity powered flotation process. The year 1919 proved a landmark for the Mount Lyell railway.

<sup>124</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1897, p. 32, Queenstown.

<sup>125</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1898, p. 28, Queenstown.

<sup>126</sup> Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Railway Statistics, Railway Department, Return No. 3, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>127</sup> Between 1 October 1905 and 31 March 1906 only 37.50 inches of rain was recorded at the Mount Lyell Mine and 32.01 inches in Queenstown - MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1906, pp. 7 & 33-34, Queenstown.

<sup>128</sup> In the wettest six months recorded, 1 April 1906 to 30 September 1906, 87.69 inches fell at the Mine and 79.24 inches in Queenstown, - MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1906, pp. 44 & 46, Queenstown.



Freight fell below 40,000 tons (39,806 tons) for the first time, causing the railway to return its first operating loss. Driffield blamed the loss on a number of unusual circumstances. The outbreak of pneumonic influenza early in 1919, combined with the prolonged seamen's strike, from 20 May to 28 August 1919, greatly reduced the railway's income earning capacity.<sup>130</sup> Copper prices fell after the war, causing outputs to decline. Although the Company considered shutting mining operations, closing the railway was not an option, although a minimum service of three trains each way per week was contemplated.<sup>131</sup>

Through judicious management, the suspension of the Lyell operations was avoided. Apart from a brief peak of 51,308 tons in 1923, the railway's freight continued to fall, until an all time low of 24,809 tons of freight was recorded in 1926. Gradually, under the helm of its new manager, Russell Murray, the fortunes of Mount Lyell were turned around. Pyritic smelting was replaced by electrolytic refining. Inefficient practices were discarded and moves to mine and treat the ore on an ever-increasing scale adopted. Freight volumes rose in 1930 to 44,645 tons, 50 per cent higher than the previous year's figures. Elsewhere on the West Coast the mineral districts had begun to suffer the effects of a depressed mineral market. Services on both the Emu Bay Railway and the Strahan to Zeehan line had been curtailed. A confident Murray considered the downgrading of train services elsewhere on the West Coast would have little effect on the company's railway.<sup>132</sup> So busy were the railway operations at the time, Murray was concerned that he had insufficient rolling stock to transport building materials that had been retrieved from the houses being dismantled in Zeehan.<sup>133</sup>

Over the years Murray considered changes to the railway. Much time and money was allocated to bridge maintenance, particularly on the Quarter Mile Bridge. Consideration was given to deviating the railway along the western banks of the King River, to avoid using the Quarter Mile and the Teepookana Steel Bridges.<sup>134</sup> The greatest threat to the railway's operations came on 19 November 1932 with the opening of the West Coast road between Hobart and Queenstown. Murray noted that the

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<sup>129</sup> B Sawyer, Local Superintendent, letter to Company Secretary, 27 November 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, p. 817, AOT.

<sup>130</sup> C Driffield, Annual Report to R Sticht, 10 October 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, p. 782, AOT.

<sup>131</sup> C Driffield, letter to R Sticht, 9 February 1921, Half-yearly Reports of the Engineer in Charge, NS 1711/269, p. 76, AOT.

<sup>132</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 16 January 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/352, p. 473, AOT.

<sup>133</sup> R Murray letter to FP St. Hill, Commissioner of Railways, 21 April 1931, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/684, p. 510, AOT.



principal freight carried by the lorries comprised perishables and farm produce. He advised his Board that the Emu Bay Railway was more likely to be affected by the competition 'but it is too early at this stage to say whether or not the road traffic for heavy material will prove profitable to the carriers.'<sup>135</sup> Elsewhere in the State, the road competition was confined to the higher-rated classes of goods, leaving the lower-rated goods to the railways.<sup>136</sup> Murray need not have worried. Freight carried by the railway jumped from 46,316 tons in 1934 to 78,619 tons in 1935, the rise brought about by the increases of production.<sup>137</sup>

### **Social Benefits and Massive Profits**

The Abt railway played a vital role in the day to day social and business life of the Lyell community. The following section looks briefly at the role of the railways and tramways on the West Coast in meeting the needs of isolated communities. It also examines the profitability of the railway's operations and the importance the Company attached to retaining control of its enterprise. The devious methods by which the Company fed misleading figures to the community, the government and shareholders to hide its real profits are outlined. They demonstrate that both Sticht and Murray were fully involved in the cover-up that continued well over three decades.

Before the completion of the West Coast road in 1932, all freight, mail and visitors arrived in Queenstown by train. Holidays, excursions and picnics started and ended aboard the train. For the families and workers living along the line, in the small settlements of Lynchford, Rinadeena, Dubbil Barril, Camp Spur, Teepookana and Lowana, the railway was a lifeline. It facilitated trips to school, assisted with medical emergencies and evacuations in times of floods and fires, and delivered the daily milk, bread and mail. Elsewhere on the West Coast, the myriad of railways and tramways were instrumental in developing and advancing the social fabric of isolated communities. The Emu Bay Railway provided a valuable service for the many farming, mining and timber-cutting settlements along the line, particularly the tin mining town of Waratah. Local historian Margery Godfrey recounts that 'On New Year's Day special trains carried virtually the "whole of Waratah" to Burnie for the sports...there was

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<sup>134</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 24 February 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/353, p. 12, AOT.

<sup>135</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 23 September 1932, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/354, p. 331, AOT.

<sup>136</sup> JPPP, Report on the working of the Government Railways and Ferry Service for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1933, 1933, paper 15, p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> R Murray report to Company Secretary, 23 October 1935, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/358, pp. 238-240, AOT.

traffic the other way as special trains carried North-West Coasters and people from far West coast places to Waratah for its sports days.<sup>138</sup>

The small 2' gauge tramways on the Coast played similar roles to the larger railways, providing an important social outlet for mining towns. In the isolated silver-lead mining town of Tullah, located on the northern periphery of the West Coast mineral region, the Farrell Tramway served the community with distinction. Former Tullah resident, Jean Thorne, recalls the engines on the tram acted as an efficient bush telegraph, the driver and townsfolk having devised a whistling system to advise of incoming strangers, including school and mine inspectors and the police. The train carried everything, boxes of racing pigeons included, 'you name it, it was sure to be on the goods truck, for there was no industry in Tullah, apart from the mine.'<sup>139</sup> In the Zeehan district, before World War 1, numerous railways and tramways radiated out from Zeehan, serving the communities of Williamsford, Mount Read, Ringville, Dundas, Comstock and Silver Bell. On Boxing Day 1907 four excursion trains carried 2,000 people from around the Zeehan area to Strahan for the day. The rail network about Zeehan served as arteries, the traffic rising and falling in sympathy with mining activity.<sup>140</sup> Closer to Mount Lyell, the North Mount Lyell line provided an important communal outlet for those living at Gormanston, Linda, Crotty, Darwin and Pillinger. Former Linda resident, Edward Wedd recalls his childhood memories of the railway picnics:

Once a year the workers' unions organized a picnic to Pillinger...it was a great day at the port. The brass band was in attendance, and there were races and novelty events for adults and children...The mothers tried to take their young children home in the first two trains. The courting couples came home on them also, with the last train usually bringing home the men, who had spent most of the day in the hotel.<sup>141</sup>

The mine and smelter's picnics became an annual institution about the Lyell region. Supported by the Company, the first Mount Lyell Company's Employees' Picnic was held on Sunday 5 December 1897 at Piccaninni Point. An estimated 600 people journeyed by train from Queenstown to Teepookana. From Teepookana a fleet of launches and barges carried the picknickers to Piccaninni Point at the mouth of the King River. The local paper pronounced the day a success:

It brought together the officers and employees of the company in a pleasant social way. It broke the monotony of the continuous grind, in a place where work goes on from one week's end to another, and furnished real enjoyment to hundreds whose duties have prevented them from

<sup>138</sup> M Godfrey, *Waratah – Pioneer of the West*, Waratah, Municipality of Waratah, 1984, pp. 26-27.

<sup>139</sup> J Thorne, *Whistle at the Bridge*, Hobart, Cat & Fiddle Press, 1980, pp. 17, 19-20.

<sup>140</sup> L Whitham, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People*, Sandy Bay, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>141</sup> E Wedd, *Linda – Ghost Town of Mt. Lyell*, Queenstown, E Wedd, 1987, p. 2.

participating in the pleasures of an excursion from the vicinity of their labours to a delightful spot not reached by the smoke from the Smelters. It showed the people that they have facilities for genuine recreation in this part of the world, and it will certainly have the effect of inducing them to be less discontented with their lot.<sup>142</sup>

To relieve the lack of early passenger facilities on the Mount Lyell railway, the Company initially fitted temporary bench seats into the open goods trucks. A passenger coach was eventually ordered from London, arriving in Queenstown in October 1897. Sticht was impressed with the carriage's superior internal fittings and design, but hesitated to run it regularly until after the arrival of the second Abt locomotive. Its heavy weight impacted significantly on the freight loads capable of being hauled over the Abt sections. Sticht subsequently directed that the carriage be limited to first class paying passengers. In an effort to upgrade the lot of the general travelling public, he advised his Directors that 'it is our intention to fix up one or two of the present passenger trucks somewhat better, adding to them closed sides &c and using them for second class cars.'<sup>143</sup> The Company moved to a single class fare system by 1908, charging all passengers the second class rates.<sup>144</sup>

In its formative years the Company was limited to minor repairs and assembling imported engines and rolling stock. In view of its isolation, the long delays and high costs associated with importing carriages, the Company sought a far greater self-sufficiency in this area. It expanded its workshops and trained workers in the required skills. The newly-constructed running sheds and machine shops were fitted with modern machinery and carried many spare parts, promoting a diverse range of railway maintenance activities.<sup>145</sup> The workshops built carriages and components for the Company's rolling stock and fleet of engines. Among the works was the manufacture of various parts for the locomotive used on the South Tharsis electric tramway.<sup>146</sup> The first of the two smaller passenger carriages constructed by the Company was placed in use before the end of March 1898.<sup>147</sup> A third passenger carriage was completed in the following November, the *Mount Lyell Standard* noting 'it combines strength with lightness. The decorative part of the work has been entrusted to Messrs S. Prismall and Co., of Queenstown and Strahan, who have done the varnishing and painting in an

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<sup>142</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 December 1897.

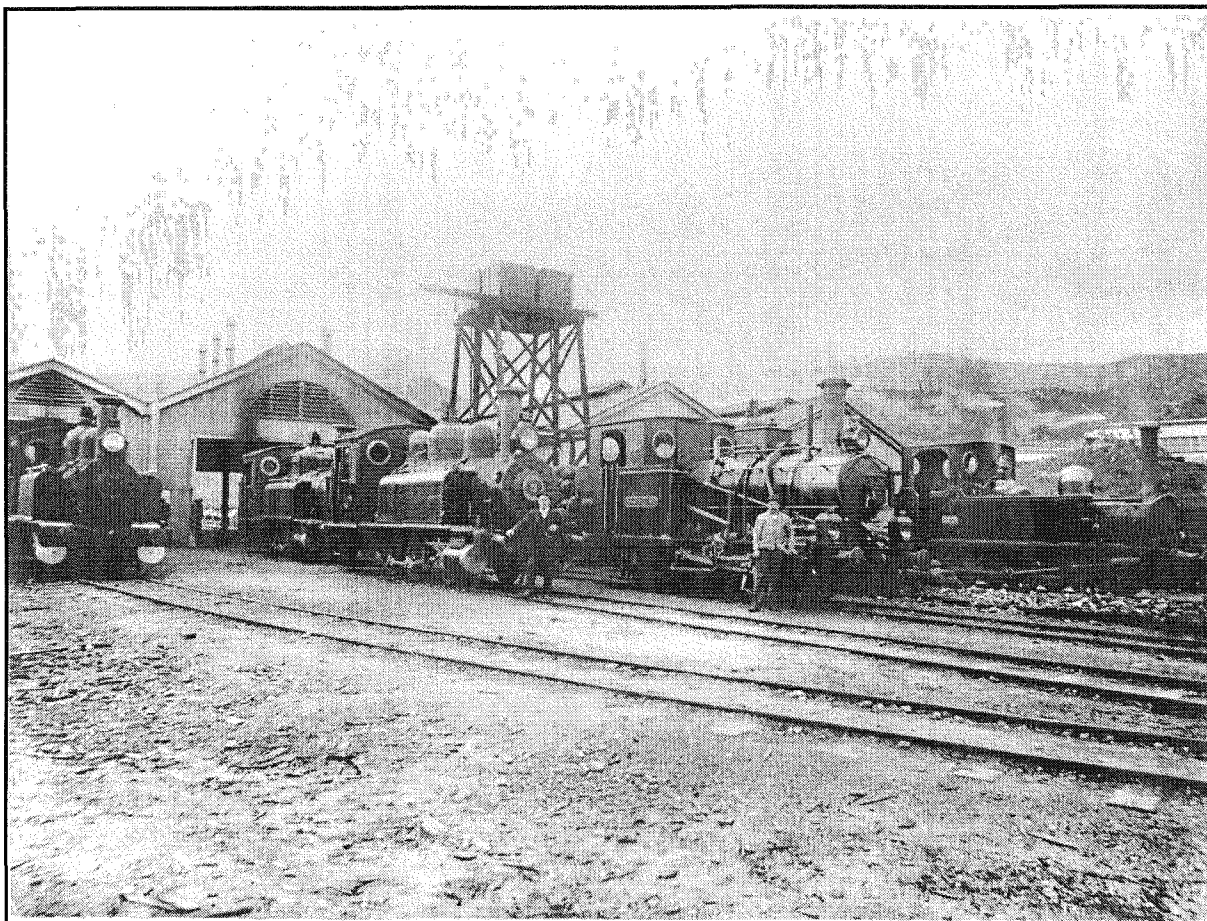
<sup>143</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 6 November 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, Volume 4, NS 1711/312, pp. 549-550, AOT.

<sup>144</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 November 1908.

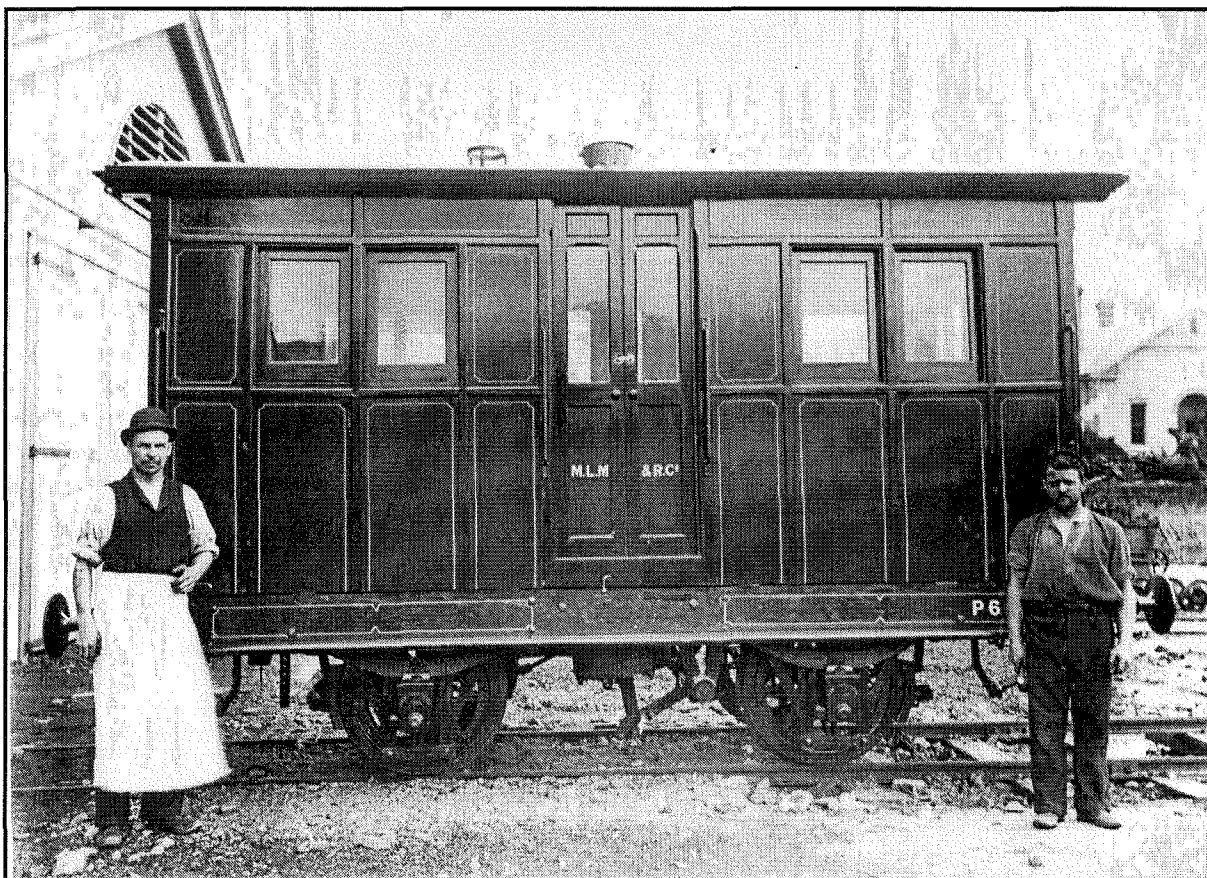
<sup>145</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 25 June 1898.

<sup>146</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 9 October 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 193, AOT.

<sup>147</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1898, p. 26, Queenstown.



RAILWAY WORKSHOPS, MOUNT LYELL – c. 1900



NEWLY BUILT CARRIAGE AT QUEENSTOWN – c. 1898

artistic manner.’<sup>148</sup> To improve the comfort of the first class passengers, the Company had ordered two bogie corridor carriages with clerestory roofs, glass sides and glass ends from the Lancaster Carriage and Waggon Company Limited. Of lighter weight than the first imported carriage, they were placed in service in November 1900. Fitted with superior appointments and capable of carrying thirty-six passengers, the Company conferred on ‘the travelling public a blessing they know in no other part of the colonies.’<sup>149</sup>

Railway travel provided a stark contrast between rainforest beauty of the King River and the bare and barren hills of Queenstown. A first-time tourist commented:

As we get within three or four miles of Queenstown the scenery changes with remarkable abruptness. Instead of forest splendour everything is withered and dry, till we have no trees, undergrowth, or grass whatever. Not a vestige of green as far as we can see up the mountain side. Stumps everywhere, black and charred. Right before us is Queenstown...the hugs [sic] stack at the end of the town belching out volumes of thick black smoke causes a feeling of depression to come over us. After our railway journey through a miniature Paradise we feel as though we had entered the inferno of the lost...it is with a feeling of relief [sic] we embark on our train to return through the exhilarating mountain scenery, which has not been spoiled by sulphur fumes or the woodman’s axe.<sup>150</sup>

Sticht acknowledged the role played by the railways in providing an escape from the everyday drudgery. He keenly promoted the picnics. Sticht considered the need for the social outlets was far more pressing for the Mount Lyell workers than for their mainland counterparts on account of their need to be temporarily removed from their harsh environment, if only for a day. On recreation, Sticht considered ‘the Mainland employes [sic] no doubt religiously take their ordinary holidays, week-ends, and so on, while all those recreative periods are excluded here, so that the annual picnic, which is about all the recreation that most of the men here take, is a very important outing for them.’<sup>151</sup> Aside from picnics, Sticht used the railways and tramways as a means of placating worker unrest and advancing social welfare issues. A free train service was implemented on 28 May 1912<sup>152</sup> to assist Lyell Comstock, North Mount Lyell and Mount Lyell mine workers, although Sticht was keen not to overdo these services otherwise the Reduction Works men would expect similar benefits.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>148</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 November 1898.

<sup>149</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 19 November 1900.

<sup>150</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 November 1908.

<sup>151</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 3 December 1909, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, p. 385, AOT.

<sup>152</sup> Company Secretary letter to R Sticht, 4 June 1912, File 5/1/2, page unnumbered, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>153</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 21 March 1913, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, p. 656, AOT.

In 1920, the Company canvassed welfare options to improve general living conditions. Cheap weekend Queenstown to Strahan excursion fares were introduced on 7 October 1920, to enable the workers and their families to enjoy the wide-open spaces of the Strahan beaches. Fares were reduced to the extent that Sticht anticipated the trips would run at a loss.<sup>154</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* considered the exercise to be a useful and admirable departure from old methods, stating it was ‘an occasional change therefore is desirable and beneficial, and to those who need it most the music of the sound of the ocean and the sweet zone which pours in from over the sea form a kind of special benediction of Nature.’<sup>155</sup> The excursions proved popular. The Company ensured all workers received the benefit of the outing by providing feeder services from as far afield as the Lake Margaret village.<sup>156</sup>

Passenger numbers carried by the railway climbed steadily from 19,667 in 1897 to a maximum of 51,556 people in 1900, the figures being inflated by the connection of the through line to Regatta Point.<sup>157</sup> Passenger numbers were maintained the following year at 50,939, as connections to Strahan, Zeehan, Burnie and beyond were opened. As the novelty of rail travel declined, so too did the numbers. The high cost of train travel deterred many. Annual figures between 1904 and 1911 fluctuated between a minimum of 25,501 in 1905 to a maximum of 32,183 in 1908. From 1912 to 1935, the numbers showed little change from year to year, with between 20,000 to 25,000 carried annually. A small upward spike occurred in 1921 (27,669), reflecting the cheap weekend excursions. Following the opening of the West Coast road in 1932, the General Manager, Russell Murray, contemplated procuring a rail motor to run through to Zeehan to cater for the increasing numbers of tourists. Despite his initial enthusiasm for the project, it did not proceed as it was too difficult to obtain running rights over the Strahan-Zeehan line.<sup>158</sup> The Abt Railway proved a lifeblood to the Lyell communities. It also served the Company well, hauling freight at substantial profits.

Although the initial railway revenue was encouraging, the Mount Lyell Company considered they were inappropriate as they had been pegged to those charged on the Strahan to Zeehan line. This imposition arose from the railway’s enabling legislation, *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act*. It had been passed in 1892, before the

<sup>154</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 1 October 1920, Letterbook relating to Welfare Work conducted by the Company, NS 1711/546, pp. 24-27, AOT.

<sup>155</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 November 1920.

<sup>156</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 November 1920.

<sup>157</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1900, p. 21, Queenstown.

<sup>158</sup> R Murray letter to the Company Secretary, 21 November 1933, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/355, pp. 460-461, AOT.

contemplation of the more expensive Abt System. On 25 April 1898 the Company petitioned Parliament to increase its freight rates and to defer the prescribed date of December 1913, upon which the government could acquire the railway.<sup>159</sup> Queenstown residents were irate upon learning of the Company's plan to increase the tariffs. At the 14 June 1898 public meeting a strong outpouring of resentment occurred. Many considered the charges were high enough and the cost of living in the isolated region would increase should such an imposition occur. Carus Driffield defended his Company's stance, advising that the line returned about 4.6 per cent on capital, a reasonable amount. Dissatisfied by the Company's response, the meeting formed a Committee to organise a petition against the proposed amendment to the Act.<sup>160</sup> The petition, signed by 190 people, was lodged in Parliament. It fully refuted the understated profit figures presented by Driffield.<sup>161</sup>

The convening of the Select Committee 30 June 1898 provided a forum to review the fares and charges and enabled the Committee to probe the Company's intended location of its permanent wharf facilities, at Pine Cove or at Regatta Point, near Strahan. The Company argued that an increase in railway tariffs would be off-set by the savings once the railway was extended into Strahan, as the need to transship goods would be removed. As no precedent existed in Australia, overseas examples were cited in support of increased running costs and charges incurred by Abt Systems. Frederick Back, General Manager of the Tasmanian Government Railways, supported the higher tariffs. The Committee found that an increase in charges was warranted. In a trade off, the Committee recommended adding an extra nine miles to the actual through mileage for charging purposes and deferring the government's option to purchase the railway until 1938. In return, the Company committed to extend its railway into the Town of Strahan, at or near Regatta Point.<sup>162</sup>

Maintaining control of the unique railway was of paramount importance to the Company. Its skilful manipulation of negotiations during the Select Committee stage was reflected in the new legislation *The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Act, 1898*. The Company achieved significant outcomes that would ensure profits and the control of its railway. Effectively, the Company had already resolved to abandon its inefficient freight handling operations at Teepookana in favour of extending to Regatta Point.

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<sup>159</sup> The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1898, (Private): Report of Select Committee with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1898, paper 34, p. 5.

<sup>160</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 August 1898.

<sup>161</sup> The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1898, (Private): Report of Select Committee with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1898, paper 34, p. 10.

Internal Company reports ruled out Pine Cove as a viable option. The gains procured through the legislation provided welcome news for Kelly and his fellow directors. They hoped the railway would emulate the successes of the Silverton Tramway Company at Broken Hill, which paid 30 per cent dividends in poor years and 50 per cent in good years.<sup>163</sup>

Parliament accepted the majority of the Select Committee's recommendations, although it deferred the application of the increased charges until the completion of the railway through to Regatta Point. Even though burdened with an inefficient port operation at Teepookana, the railway had returned a gross profit of £9,988 11s.11d. in 1897.<sup>164</sup> Based on a construction cost of £116,100, including locomotives, rolling stock and infrastructure, this figure represented an 8.6 per cent return on the capital cost.<sup>165</sup> This was to be one of the few times the Company accurately reported its gross profits in its statistical returns to government. During 1898 the Company incurred much public criticism for seeking increased charges. The Company reported a gross profit of £12,499 3s.5d.,<sup>166</sup> well below the actual £17,499 3s.5d. shown in confidential internal reports.<sup>167</sup> The variance between the officially reported gross profits and the Company's actual gross profits varied significantly over the next three years, with the official figures in 1899 reported to be £18,668 14s.5d.<sup>168</sup> (actual £30,668 14s.5d.), in 1900 £19,652 0s.9d.<sup>169</sup> (actual £43,421 0s.3d.) and in 1901 £13,924 6s.6d.<sup>170</sup> (actual £27,386 7s.6d.).<sup>171</sup>

In 1902 the Mount Lyell railway earned nearly double the net revenue per mile operated when compared to other West Coast railways (Emu Bay, North Mount Lyell and the Strahan-Zeehan line) and all government railways Australia wide and in New Zealand. Its gross profit of 8.3 per cent was well over double that of the second placed railway.<sup>172</sup> The Company downgraded its annual gross profits, from an actual £18,235 12s.3d. to £6,235 12s.3d.<sup>173</sup> Over the six year period, from 1897 to 1902, the

<sup>162</sup> The Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1898, (Private): Report of Select Committee with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1898, paper 34, pp. 25-26.

<sup>163</sup> G Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance – How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited, 2001, p. 263.

<sup>164</sup> Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 3, 1897-1901, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>165</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1897, 1898, paper 68, p. 219.

<sup>166</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1898, 1899, paper 73, p. 223.

<sup>167</sup> Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 3, 1897-1901, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>168</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1899, 1900, paper 67, p. 225.

<sup>169</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1900, 1901, paper 38, p. 158.

<sup>170</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1901, 1902, paper 67, p. 279.

<sup>171</sup> The actual profits are shown in Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 3, 1897-1901, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>172</sup> Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 4, 1902, NS 726/9, AOT.

<sup>173</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1902, 1903, paper 27, p. 283.



Company's railway returned an actual gross profit of £147,199 9s.9d., 65 per cent of the railway's book cost of £225,454.<sup>174</sup> The returns to government for this same period totalled £80,966, a return of nearly 36 per cent on the book cost. However, for the twelve months ending 30 September 1902, the railway's published gross profit was £9,200, half that indicated in the internal reports.<sup>175</sup>

The subterfuge of understating actual profits to government and in the Company's Half-yearly and Annual Reports<sup>176</sup> was achieved by reducing gross receipts. The Company charged an internal fee to each department based on economic rates for the freight carried. These fees were then discounted to produce an acceptable reported "bottom line." The internal summary of returns for the period 1 January 1897 to 30 September 1913 reveals the railway's gross profits reached £405,580 14s.0d., well in excess of the revised construction cost of £216,086. Of the total gross receipts of £747,833 some £522,157 (69.8 per cent) was attributed to Company generated traffic and £225,676 (30. 2 per cent) to the general public.<sup>177</sup> Profits continued to be misreported. In February 1915 Carus Driffield advised the Company's Local Superintendent, Basil Sawyer, of the two sets of figures for the year ending 30 September 1914. The first set, provided for internal Company purposes and marked "Confidential," revealed an actual working profit of £37,081 15s.6d.,<sup>178</sup> and the second set provided to government showed a profit of just £8,582.<sup>179</sup> Keeping two sets of figures occurred under both Robert Sticht's and Russell Murray's management regimes. The on-going deception was still evident in the 1935 returns when the government was advised of a gross profit of £3,955<sup>180</sup> and the Company Secretary £15,616 12s. 8d.<sup>181</sup>

The reasons for the Company's early fight to retain the long-term ownership of the railway are obvious. In its first year of full operations (1897) the railway had returned a gross profit of nearly £10,000, which was likely to improve considerably upon completing its major expansion program. The Company could ill-afford to have

<sup>174</sup> Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 3, General Summary, 1 January 1897 to 31 December 1902, NS 726/9, AOT.

<sup>175</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-years ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1902, pp. 32-33, and 30<sup>th</sup> September 1902, pp. 32-33, Queenstown.

<sup>176</sup> Half-yearly reporting was maintained until 31 March 1917, following which the Company changed to annual reporting, effective 30 September each year.

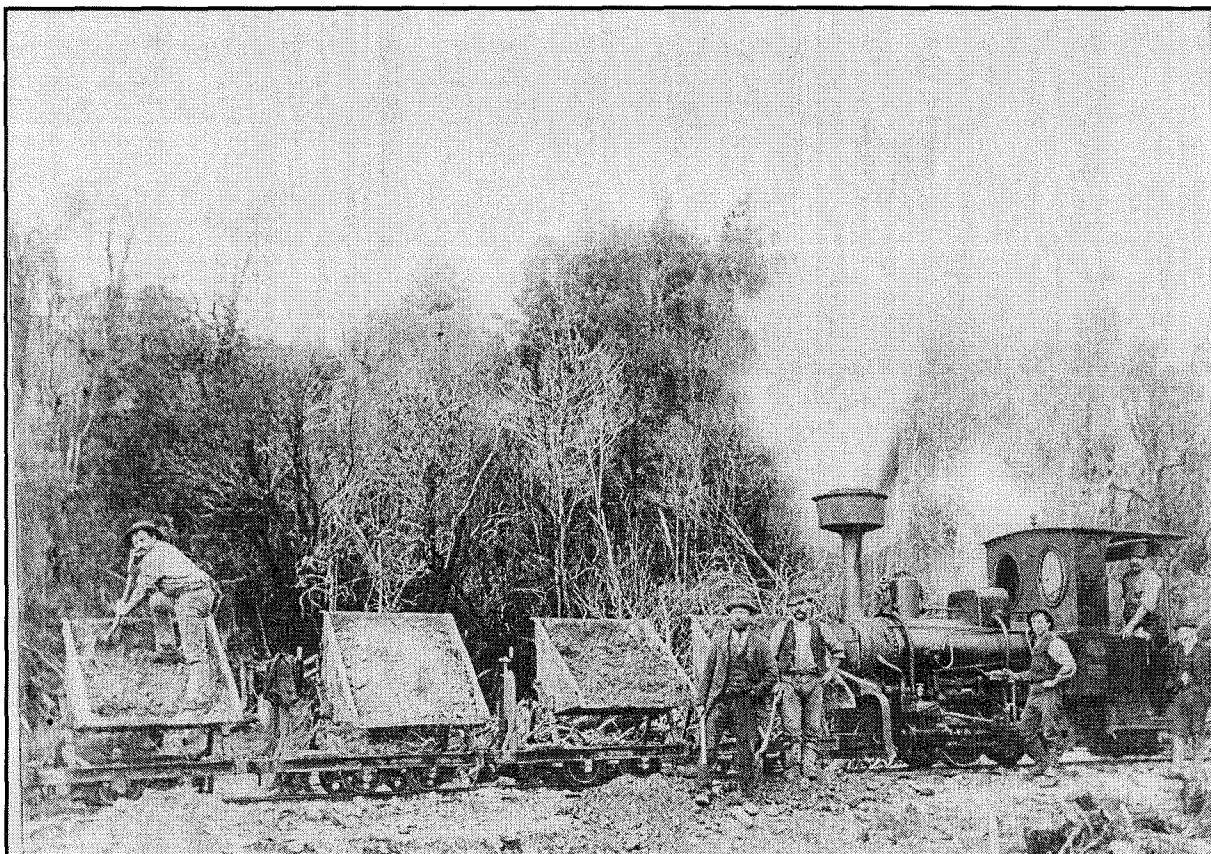
<sup>177</sup> Railway Department Statistics, Return No. 4, General Summary, 1 January 1897 to 30 September 1913, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>178</sup> C Driffield letter to B Sawyer, Half Yearly Reports of the Engineer in Charge, 26 February 1915, NS 1711/269, p. 12, AOT.

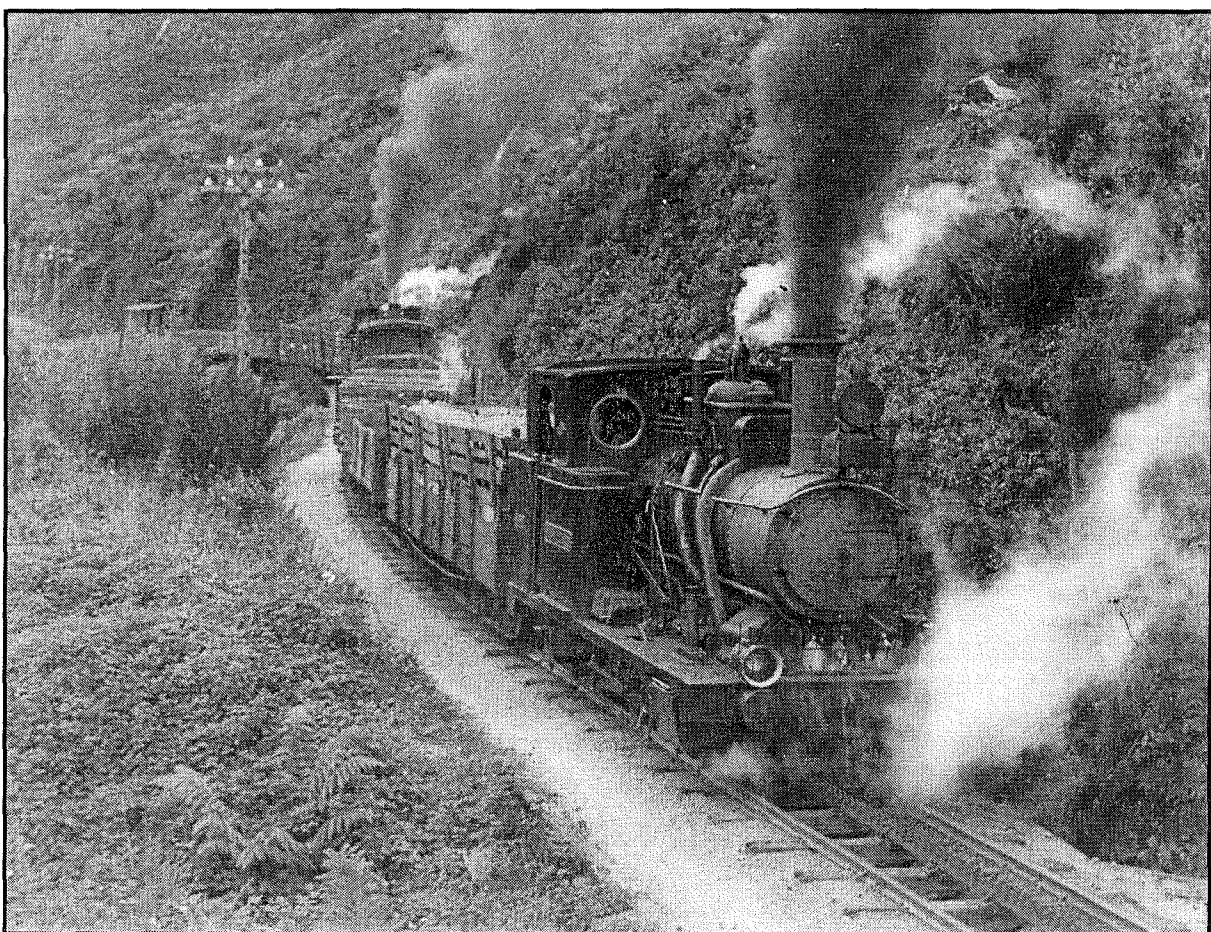
<sup>179</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1914-15, 1915, paper 21, p. 207.

<sup>180</sup> Return of Railway Statistics for year ended 30 September 1935, 23 January 1936, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/358, p. 433, AOT.

<sup>181</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 23 October 1935, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/358, p. 239, AOT.



**KRAUSS LOCOMOTIVE ON TRAMWAY CONSTRUCTION WORKS – c. 1896**



**ABT LOCOMOTIVES WORKING THE RACK RAILS**

the railway acquired by the government and then be forced to pay exorbitant fees. In the first five years the Company recovered well over half the railway's total capital cost. The best year, 1900, showed a profit of £43,421, a 19.7 per cent return on the investment. The directors would have liked to silence the Company's critics by releasing the actual returns, but it was a delicate matter as it was the Lyell community that had significantly contributed to the high profits. An underlying distrust of the Company's profit motives remained within the community well after the outcome of the Select Committee's investigation into the railway's charges. Some months after the disastrous 12 October 1912 fire at the North Mount Lyell Mine, the Company's long-serving local solicitor, Ambrose Winch, wrote to Robert Sticht advising him of the discontent still festering in the community because of the high railway tariffs:

I have so faithfully placed the facts from my own view point that if the same became known to the business section of the community I would become anathema and would have to seek a living elsewhere. Unfortunately much of the discontent and trouble from which your Company has suffered had their beginnings in exorbitant [sic] prices and the constant proclamation of the freight myth. The cry has always been look what I have to pay for double freights and the people have not had the mind to examine it and prove its falsity.<sup>182</sup>

With the situation apparently beyond retrieval, Sticht and Murray could do little more than to continue the practice of understating the railway's income so as to ensure the stated profits met community expectations.<sup>183</sup> Even the educated outsider had little inkling as to the true economic viability of the Company's railway. In his 1928 study of Tasmanian railways, economist Torleiv Hytten commented:

Probably this is the best kept railway in the Island, and is, as far as can be ascertained, a payable proposition. But its running is only incidental to the mining operations of the Company, and the separation of accounts is not complete enough to get accurate figures.<sup>184</sup>

The Company was entitled to recover reasonable returns from its railway from an early stage. Not only was the innovative venture potentially high risk and more expensive to operate than conventional railways, it also faced competition from railways mooted for construction both from within and outside the Lyell field.

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<sup>182</sup> A Winch letter to R Sticht, 24 April 1913, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pp. 689-690, AOT.

<sup>183</sup> EC Driffield Annual Report to R Sticht, 11 October 1918, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/335, p. 678, AOT.

<sup>184</sup> T Hytten, 1928, 'A Study in railway economics – with special reference to the Government Railways of Tasmania,' unpublished MA Thesis, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, p. 17.

## Railway Competition – Fact and Fantasy

The following section outlines the attempts by various railway consortia to win over the copper riches by building railways between Mount Lyell and the ports of Burnie, Hobart, Launceston and Kelly Basin. In particular, it examines the close links between the Mount Lyell and Emu Bay Railway management regimes and the unsuccessful challenge mounted by the North Mount Lyell Copper Company to operate the dominant railway on the field.

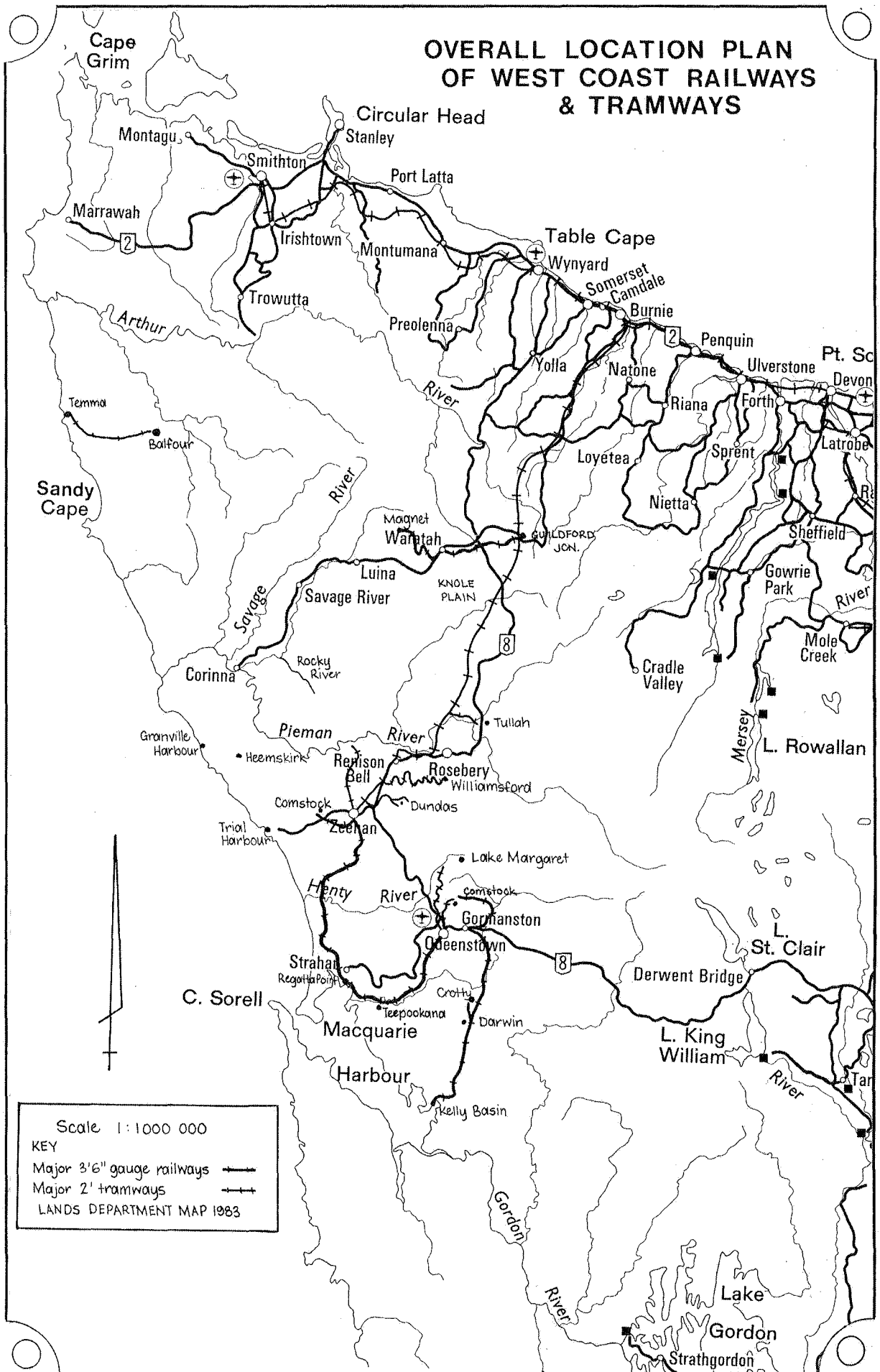
The blossoming of the Mount Lyell mine through the mid-1890s saw forgotten railway plans ‘thawed by the copper boom, which made Mount Lyell the goal of the fiercest railway war in Australian history.’<sup>185</sup> Challenges to the dominance of the Abt Railway were mounted by four consortia, each securing enabling Acts of Parliament that permitted construction of a railway to the Mount Lyell district. The legislation, in chronological order, provided for overland railways to the ports of Emu Bay (28 August 1896), Hobart (26 November 1896), Kelly Basin (24 December 1897) and Launceston (1 December 1899). On a smaller scale, but equally ambitious, was *The Queenstown and Gormanston Tramway Act, 1896*, which sanctioned the construction of a steam hauled tramway between the two towns.

The Emu Bay Railway was promoted by James Smith Reid, one of three backers of the consortium that had secured the *Waratah and Zeehan Act 1891*. The 28 August 1896 passing of the *Van Diemen’s Land Company’s Waratah and Zeehan Railway Act, 1896*, provided Reid with a second opportunity to build the railway. This time the shares in the newly-formed company sold quickly. A public furore soon developed when the advertised prospectus for the Company unexpectedly revealed plans to construct a branch line to Mount Lyell. The parochial southern interests accused the Premier, Sir Edward Braddon, of favouring the Emu Bay consortium. Legal complexities arose over the validity of building the branch line to Mount Lyell. It was resolved that the branch line was permissible only if the Emu Bay Company first built its railway into Zeehan, as required by the enabling Act. Braddon defended a motion of no confidence on 29 October 1897 that followed the widespread criticism of his support of the Emu Bay Company.<sup>186</sup> His impartiality on the matter was open to question. Braddon had close affiliations with the sponsors of the Emu Bay Company. When Agent-General in London in 1892, he had been nominated as a director of the Great Northern Railway, which was promoted by Reid. Braddon was equally well-acquainted

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<sup>185</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 113.

<sup>186</sup> L Rae, *The Emu Bay Railway*, Hobart, L Rae, 1997, pp. 79-85.



MAP 15 – LOCATION MAP OF WEST COAST RAILWAYS AND TRAMWAYS

with the directors of the Mount Lyell Company, both when serving as Agent-General and then as Premier, and he had 'always shown a very friendly attitude towards the Company.'<sup>187</sup>

The relationship between the two railway companies is interesting. The impact of a branch line to Queenstown would have severely impacted on the Abt Railway's viability. It is apparent that a very close liaison existed between the two Companies. Their leading principals shared strong ties with Broken Hill. Bowes Kelly and William Jamieson were joint directors at Mount Lyell and on the first Board of the Emu Bay Railway Company. In an interview given at the time, Bowes Kelly admitted to being a long term supporter of Reid's plans to build a line to the West Coast, but advised that he was unaware of any immediate plans to extend the branch line to Mount Lyell. However, Kelly envisaged that at some future time it might be profitable to proceed with building the line. He believed the railway connection to Emu Bay was long overdue as it would facilitate the delivery of stock, feed and produce to the mining settlements. Kelly considered the railway would 'open up large and exceedingly valuable mineral areas and it will induce hundreds of moneyed men who would not think of coming to the Coast by way of Macquarie Harbour, with its uninviting entrance, to visit these mining fields.'<sup>188</sup> Blainey contends that, had Lyell become 'a field of thirty thousand people and the sand bar still blocked the entrance to Macquarie Harbour, the Emu Bay Company would build a railway to Mt Lyell.'<sup>189</sup>

As early branch line survey investigations proceeded, Mount Lyell officials provided the Emu Bay company's surveyors with information to help identify the route between Rosebery and Mount Lyell.<sup>190</sup> Kelly and his cohorts saw genuine advantages in advancing the construction of the Emu Bay railway. For years the Broken Hill men had demonstrated a keen interest to develop the West Coast mineral fields. The new railway promised to resolve many of the transport problems that had prevented development in the isolated mineral districts about Rosebery. It would provide alternate access to port facilities for the Lyell mines should the shallow entrance to Macquarie Harbour remain unresolved. The ability to construct a relatively short branch line to Mount Lyell deterred the southern and northern railway consortia hoping to capture the Lyell trade. Two years later Walter Harcourt Palmer, the Great Western Railway promoter, admitted the proposed Emu Bay branch line to Mount Lyell had affected his

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<sup>187</sup> Company Secretary, confidential letter to R Sticht, 23 July 1896, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>188</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 October 1897.

<sup>189</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 120.

chances of floating the railway.<sup>191</sup> At the height of the railway imbroglio in late 1897, the Mount Lyell Company remained undecided as to its preferred long-term rail and shipping options. It successfully used the Emu Bay railway as an early lever to negotiate lower shipping rates with the Union Steamship Company. Upon the opening of the railway three years later it purchased twenty-five heavy-duty wagons and freighted coke and coal from Burnie, via Zeehan and Strahan to Queenstown.<sup>192</sup>

The branch line between Rosebery and Mount Lyell never proceeded past the survey stage. The two companies continued to share common interests. In 1908 the Mount Lyell Company purchased the Chester Mine, located at Mount Kershaw, north of Rosebery, and negotiated a contract to cart the pyritic ore by rail to Burnie. Over a period of four years 37,000 tons of sulphur rich ore were exported to the Mount Lyell Company's fertiliser works at Yarraville, near Melbourne. Unfortunately, for both concerns, the mine failed to live up to expectations. In the ensuing claim for compensation against the Mount Lyell Company, the Emu Bay Company was awarded £8,014, which provided a welcome injection of funds at a time when the railway was struggling to make ends meet.<sup>193</sup> Unlike the Abt Railway, the Emu Bay Company's operations did not prove a successful venture for Kelly and Jamieson. After the collapse of the heavy metals market at the commencement of World War 1 its mineral traffic declined markedly and over the following two decades the Company operated under the threat of closure. It was not until the Electrolytic Zinc Company commenced its processing operations at its Rosebery works on 19 February 1936 that the railway's dwindling fortunes were slowly turned around. In 1965 the Emu Bay Railway Company finally erased all its debts and paid its first dividend after sixty-eight years of operation.<sup>194</sup>

The second threat to the viability of the Abt Railway came from the *The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore-reduction Company Act, 1896*. Under the legislation, the railway was to link the government's Derwent Valley line to the Western Mining Division. It was anticipated a 3' 6" gauge conventional railway could be built, although the legislation provided innovative opportunities by authorising the use of Abt

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<sup>190</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 31 December 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 901, AOT.

<sup>191</sup> JPPP, *The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore-Reduction Company Bill, No. 3, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, Volume XLI* paper 71, p. 7.

<sup>192</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901, pp. 8 & 23, Queenstown.

<sup>193</sup> Rae, *Emu Bay Railway*, pp. 145 & 156.

<sup>194</sup> Rae, *Emu Bay Railway*, p. 225.



or Fell Systems and the electrification of the line. Construction was to commence within eighteen months and completion achieved within five years. Government granted the promoters a number of controversial incentives to build the line, including the exclusive lease of seven lots of Crown land adjacent to the railway, each having a maximum area of 70,000 acres. It also provided the consortia with the right to divert or appropriate water from six rivers along the railway for generating, supplying and selling electricity. Russell Young, a promoter of the railway, advised the Select Committee that the Great Western Railway would

greatly improve the material interests not only of the southern part of the Island but of the colony throughout. It appears from many commercial circumstances which have come to light, that commerce, trade, and business which ought entirely to find its way to Hobart has been filtering away from our country to Victoria.<sup>195</sup>

The Hobart business community's support of the Great Western proposal was understandable. Providing a cost effective rail link with the western mining fields would enable Hobart interests to compete against the Victorian dominance of the commercial trade on the West Coast. Hobart businesses viewed the West Coast to be "The Lost Province." The boat trip to Melbourne was considered quicker and safer than the sea route to Hobart. The growing Lyell population depended on Melbourne for commercial, sporting and social outlets. The power base of the Mount Lyell Company was predominantly Victorian. As well as the Head Office being located in Melbourne, nearly two thirds of the Company's shareholders (81,111 of 125,981) were Victorians.<sup>196</sup>

The Great Western proposal threatened the emerging dominance of the Mount Lyell Company on a number of fronts. Apart from competing directly with the Abt Railway, the promoters intended to buy local ore and rail it to reduction works to be built near Hobart. Preliminary survey works on the railway commenced in September 1897 and were completed in April 1898. The route began at Glenora and continued via Mount Arrowsmith, through the valley to the north of Mount Lyell, terminating near Zeehan. Final survey plans were lodged for the first twenty miles. Construction commenced at Glenora on 23 May 1898. The line reached as far as Westerway on 27 July 1899 before finance ran out. In Palmer's 17 October 1899 evidence to the Select Committee, he claimed the Braddon Government's perceived absolute hostility against the venture had prevented interest by English financiers and underwriters. He

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<sup>195</sup> JPPP, The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore Reduction Company's Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1896, paper 80, p. 1.



considered that, should a more liberal interpretation be applied to certain clauses in the Company's Act, the railway would be completed in two years. Palmer advised 'the flotation may be regarded as completed; the money was absolutely ready. Messrs. Pauling and Co. have actually signed the contract, the price being £1,017,000.'<sup>197</sup>

English investors hesitated to invest in far-flung and unknown regions due to the frequent failure of previous ventures. Information from remote mining fields was easily manipulated and often difficult to verify. On his 1898 visit to England, Palmer proved he could fabricate the truth as well as any of his colonial contemporaries. In an interview with the *British Australasian*, he advised that the 120 mile railway between Glenora and Mount Lyell started from a proven coal field and passed through one of the best mineral fields in the world. He told the paper 'Mr. Cawthorne, a highly respected prospector, reports no less than 14 different lodes on our property, carrying tin, copper, gold, and silver.'<sup>198</sup> Palmer's attempts to raise finance failed. Further extensions and amendments to the Act were obtained but these had lapsed by 1904, as the West Coast was now well-served by a number of railways. A final unsuccessful attempt to resurrect the railway was instigated three years later when *The Great Western Railway and Electric Power Bill, 1907 (Private)* was introduced to Parliament on 27 August 1907. Seeking similar terms and concessions granted in the original 1896 legislation, the new promoters earmarked the railway's terminus in the vicinity of Queenstown or Gormanston.<sup>199</sup> Accurately assessing the Hobart's pre-occupation with building a line to the West, Glyn Roberts reports:

The push for a connection by rail from the West Coast to the south of the state reached irrational levels in the early years of the twentieth century. This fiasco epitomised the narrow parochial view of southern business interests who persisted long after facilities were in place to carry the ore north by sea and to bring in supplies overland from the north. Economic analysis at the time clearly showed the southern rail route would never pay.<sup>200</sup>

Several Northern Tasmanian consortia pressed to build railways to the Western Mining Division, culminating in the 1 December 1899 enactment of *The Great Midland and West Coast Railway and Ore-reduction Company Act*. The proponents intended to extend the government's line from Mole Creek to Mount Lyell. The concessions

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<sup>196</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 28 November 1896.

<sup>197</sup> JPPP, *The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore-Reduction Company Bill, No. 3, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1899, Volume XLI* paper 71, p. 5.

<sup>198</sup> *British Australasian*, 16 June 1898.

<sup>199</sup> JPPP, *The Great Western Railway and Electric Power Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1907, paper 20, p. 5.*

<sup>200</sup> G Roberts, 'The Tasmanian Government and the Metal Mining Industry – An Administrative History: 1880-1914,' Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002, p. 315.

mirrored those of the Great Western. The Act conferred rights to harness water and generate electricity and offered exclusive land leases comprising a maximum of eight lots, with none to exceed 25,000 acres. Frederick Back, General Manager of the Government Railways, criticised the proposal. He warned of the possible adverse effect of the railway on traffic carried on the government's lines already constructed and on those under consideration. Back considered 'as a separate system of railway, I cannot see that it will pay the Promoters, consequently their profits must come from some other source than the traffic of the railway.'<sup>201</sup> Roberts correctly dismisses the reality of the northern proposal ever proceeding, contending that 'rail connection with the farming areas to the east of Zeehan through Launceston was never a valid option, and even a good overland road route had to wait for nearly a century because of difficult topographic problems.'<sup>202</sup>

While the Launceston and Hobart railway proposals appeared little more than fantasy, the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's challenge to railway domination was very real. The genesis of the North Mount Lyell operations grew from the Company's development of its three ten acre mining leases, sited approximately a mile to the north of the Iron Blow. Controlled by James Crotty, the North Mount Lyell concern initially mined small quantities of high grade copper ore, gold and silver. Lacking the necessary funds to develop the operation, Crotty sailed for England in early 1897 in search of financiers to support his ambitious plans. He cleverly manipulated the lack of accurate knowledge available to overseas speculators by spreading unsubstantiated claims in the influential English mining journals. He advised the *British Australasia* that his 'North Mount Lyell Mine will be a very worthy rival of the great Mount Lyell Mine...the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co.'s railway is a public carrying concern, which can be utilised if need be, but easements have been obtained which give legal rights to construct a railway or steam tramway from the mine to deep water at Macquarie Harbour.'<sup>203</sup>

Crotty gained favourable press in the *Mining Journal*, *Railway and Commercial Gazette*, extolling the virtues of his proposed railway and the immense potential of the North Mount Lyell mine.<sup>204</sup> The *Mining Journal* heavily criticised the Mount Lyell Company's Abt Railway.<sup>205</sup> Crotty's tactics proved successful. The North Mount Lyell

<sup>201</sup> JPPP, The Great Midland Railway and West Coast Railway Bill, (Private): Report of the General Manager, Tasmanian Government Railways, 1898, paper 66, p. 4.

<sup>202</sup> Roberts, 'The Tasmanian Government and the Metal Mining Industry,' p. 315.

<sup>203</sup> *British Australasian*, 29 July 1897.

<sup>204</sup> *Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 18 September 1897.

<sup>205</sup> *Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 14 August 1897

Copper Company Limited was incorporated on 20 September 1897, the funds raised being used to expand works at the mine and to identify a route for the railway. Crotty's good fortune further improved with the 20 October 1897 discovery of a rich outcrop of copper on the North Mount Lyell lease. Local newspaper reports described the ore as having 'a phenomenal richness.'<sup>206</sup>

The new Company's predecessor, the North Mount Lyell Mining Company, had applied to Parliament for an Act to empower the construction of a railway between the mine and Macquarie Harbour. It sought approval to generate and supply electricity to the mining fields. The Select Committee did not agree with the idea and limited the use of any generated electrical power to the working of the railway. Little exploration work had been carried out to determine the suitability of the land to be traversed by the railway at the time of submitting the Bill. As a safeguard, the application sought to employ the Abt or Fell Systems should the need arise. Initially, the Company considered constructing a 2' gauge line, although James Lonergan, Chairman of the Company's Melbourne Board, preferred the 2' 6" option. He advised the Committee that the Company's English backers had deemed a gauge of 3' 6" more appropriate. It was envisaged the railway would serve the needs of the Lyell area and intervening land to Macquarie Harbour. The line would service good farming land and valuable Huon pine stands near Kelly Basin and to the Company's proposed smelter site on the banks of the King River, immediately to the east of the King River Gorge. As the Mount Lyell Company had previously secured all the water rights about Mount Lyell, the North Mount Lyell Company was forced to look further afield for abundant water and timber supplies.<sup>207</sup>

Approved by Parliament on 24 December 1897, *The North Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Act* provided flexibility in the selection of gauge and the use of rack-rails for the steeper grades. Innovative opportunities existed, the Act permitting the electrification of the railway. As with the Mount Lyell Company's railway at the time, the rates were fixed to those charged on the Strahan to Zeehan line. Unlike the Mount Lyell Company, the North Lyell Company lacked a cohesive and experienced management team. Friction surfaced between its London and Melbourne administration. The conflict caused disaster. Advice provided by Lonergan and his Melbourne Board was continually overlooked. The request to delay the ordering of rolling stock until the local conditions had been fully examined was ignored, as was the

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<sup>206</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 November 1897.

preference to purchase tank engines instead of the larger tender engines. Upon hearing its recommendation to adopt the 2' 6" gauge had been rejected, the Melbourne Board requested London to reconsider. It advised that it had been unanimously agreed on 5 May 1898 that 'a 2' 6" gauge would be quite sufficient for all purposes, more suitable for the country and ensuring a great saving to the Company.'<sup>208</sup>

The adoption of a 2' 6" gauge line would not have proved popular with government as it would have introduced yet another gauge system into Tasmania. On the West Coast, as with the rest of the government's Main Line operations, the 3' 6" gauge had been employed for heavy mineral traffic. In some mining areas shorter 2' gauge tramways had been utilised with great success. A shining example of the narrow gauge steam hauled lines was the government's 2' gauge North East Dundas Tramway. This eighteen-mile line linked Zeehan and Williamsford, traversing extremely difficult country. The breakthrough construction techniques in the rough terrain, combined with the Tramway's ability to handle heavy traffic, were considered to be extremely innovative. Transport historian, Peter James, contends the tramway played an important role in the development of the world's railways, 'particularly those of the British colonial narrow gauge railways.'<sup>209</sup> This line served as a model for future mineral tramways and was also responsible for the 'revolution in Victorian railway construction.'<sup>210</sup>

The Company's struggling management fostered poor practices and wasted capital. The 16 April 1898 death of James Crotty did not assist matters. Crotty had provided a valuable conduit between the two Boards and understood both perspectives. His hatred of Bowes Kelly and total contempt for the Mount Lyell railway route are documented. Had Crotty lived longer, the demise of the Company may have been avoided. Preliminary surveys of the line had commenced by September 1897, but it took nearly a year before the final plans were completed. Like many of the Company's business dealings, the lack of scrutiny and rigour was questioned in the awarding of the contract for the twenty-eight mile railway. The original estimate for a thirty mile, 2' 6" gauge line was £92,486 10s., or £3,031 per mile.<sup>211</sup> This sum was considerably less

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<sup>207</sup> JPPP, The Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1897, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1897, paper 68.

<sup>208</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, Minutes: 6 January 1898, p. 5, 24 January 1898, pp. 7 & 8, and 5 May 1898, pp. 29 & 30, AOT.

<sup>209</sup> PC James, The History of the North East Dundas Railway, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA)*, vol 18, no 2, 1971, pp. 39-64.

<sup>210</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 February 1897.

<sup>211</sup> JPPP, The Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1897, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence and Appendices, 1897, paper 68, p. 21.

than the £150,000 (£5,252 per mile) for the 3' 6" gauge railway, as agreed by the Company and the contractors, Baxter and Saddler. Claims of inconsistency arose when it was subsequently revealed that the Board had allowed the firm to reduce its original tender by £9,000 to win the work.<sup>212</sup> The completion date was ambitiously set at one year<sup>213</sup> in the 17 November 1898 contract<sup>214</sup>

By April 1899 works had moved into full swing, with about 900 men employed.<sup>215</sup> Alfred Clayton, the Engineer-in-Chief, reported that the contractors had every confidence the railway would be completed within the stipulated time.<sup>216</sup> Unfortunately, the wet winter slowed progress. Landslips and poor country about the "Razor Back" created major problems. A year after signing the contract only ten miles of line had been completed, from Kelly Basin to "Purgatory Gap."<sup>217</sup> Formation works had progressed as far as the banks of the King River.<sup>218</sup>

The railway took nearly two years to complete, the first through trip between Kelly Basin and the Linda terminus occurring in early September 1900.<sup>219</sup> The first revenue-earning train was dispatched from Kelly Basin on 24 September,<sup>220</sup> returning laden with ore the following day. In their 13 December 1900 report to shareholders, the Company's directors expressed great disappointment at the delays in construction, blaming the unusually severe weather. John MacArthur, a London Director, had noted that even with the drawbacks of the Macquarie Harbour Bar, the Company's railway and port would prove far more economical than either the Burnie and Hobart alternatives. In comparing the two local railways, he considered the North Mount Lyell route from Kelly Basin to be superior as it passed near the active mining fields of Mounts Darwin and Jukes.<sup>221</sup>

The North Mount Lyell railway was finally opened on 14 December 1900. The official ceremony was delayed until the completion of the two and a quarter mile branch line into Gormanston.<sup>222</sup> The contract for this line was signed on 23 August 1900, with

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<sup>212</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, 17 October 1898, pp. 68-69, AOT.

<sup>213</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, 11 November 1898, p. 79, AOT.

<sup>214</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, 17 November 1898, p. 84, AOT.

<sup>215</sup> R Ellis, 'The North Mount Lyell Railway, Tasmania – Part 1: Construction', *The Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc (LRRSA)*, Number 105, July 1989, pp. 3-20

<sup>216</sup> The North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, Report and Statement of Accounts for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1898, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>217</sup> Purgatory Gap, ten miles from Kelly Basin, was the site of particularly heavy works, that required ongoing maintenance throughout the life of the railway.

<sup>218</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 18 November 1899.

<sup>219</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 September 1900.

<sup>220</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 September 1900.

<sup>221</sup> The North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, Report and Statement of Accounts for the period ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1900, pp. 6-7, 14-15, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>222</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 December 1900.

Baxter and Saddler required to complete works by 30 December.<sup>223</sup> Once again construction was delayed, with services finally commencing on 7 October 1901.<sup>224</sup> The branch line cost a staggering £26,000 to build, yet its terminus was only half a mile closer to Gormanston than the existing line into Linda. The exercise was viewed as one of many cases of absurd expenditure.<sup>225</sup>

The twenty-eight mile railway<sup>226</sup> between Kelly Basin and Linda employed maximum grades of 1 in 40, and featured a number of sizeable bridges, including those over the Fysh (370' long), the Crotty (360' long, 80' high), and King Rivers. The single-span King River bridge was 160 feet long, built of steel-plate and girder-iron construction, and mounted on concrete piers. Its approaches included a further 170 feet of timber trestles. Built by Dorman and Long of South Melbourne, it outstripped the Mount Lyell Company's bridge at Teepookana as the longest single span structure in the Colony. The three imported Avonside locomotives were built in Scotland, while the passenger carriages, the composite guard's vans and remainder of the waggons were made in England.<sup>227</sup> Carus Driffield, in his 15 June 1903 assessment of the North Mount Lyell operations, described the permanent way as well constructed and maintained to a high standard. He considered the Avonside locomotives to be under-powered while the three side-g geared, American built, Shay engines were of cheap and faulty construction. Driffield believed the sixty-seven ore waggons were poorly designed and useless. He noted that the buffer heights of all the rolling stock was 3', whereas the standard on Australian railways was 2' 6", making a ready sale of the waggons very difficult.<sup>228</sup>

Burdened by poor management and a high construction cost of £307,054 11s.6d, including buildings, rolling stock, wharf, pier and jetty,<sup>229</sup> the line struggled to show a return worthy of the high expense. Gross profits for 1901 totalled £2,440 11s.11d., the following year they improved marginally to £4,746 7s.9d.<sup>230</sup> Contrary to Crotty's early criticisms of the Mount Lyell railway, it was the North Mount Lyell railway that was

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<sup>223</sup> Agreement between Baxter and Saddler, 23 August 1900, Miscellaneous legal papers, Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>224</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 November 1901.

<sup>225</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 February 1902.

<sup>226</sup> The actual surveyed length of the railway between Kelly Basin and Linda was 27 miles 70 chains and 11 links.

<sup>227</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 December 1900.

<sup>228</sup> EC Driffield report to the General Manager concerning the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's Railway, 15 June 1903, Mount Lyell records, Queenstown.

<sup>229</sup> The North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, Report and Statement of Accounts for the period 1 July 1900 to 30 September 1901, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown.

<sup>230</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1901, 1902, paper 67, p. 280, and for the Year 1902, 1903, paper 27, p. 284.

inefficient, did not connect directly with the mine, and continually suffered from landslips along the permanent way. Shareholder disillusionment at the Company's poor performances, particularly those of the smelters at Crotty, was understandable. Upon assuming control of the North Mount Lyell operations in May 1903 Sticht reviewed the workings of the line. Although the railway itself was of little economic benefit to the amalgamated Company, the rights and privileges conferred under the North Mount Lyell Company's enabling legislation were of considerable value. The six timber reserves covered 4,000 acres and included valuable stands of Huon pine.<sup>231</sup>

Apart from main line workings, the railway's operations included branch lines to Gormanston (2 miles 24 chains), Crotty (2 miles 22 chains), the Darwin limestone quarry (45 chains) and to South Lyell (44.5 chains). It provided access to the vast timber resources and was vital to development on the promising Mounts Jukes and Darwin mineral fields. According to Driffield, it was 'certainly within the bounds of reasonable conjecture that discoveries of importance to the Company's operations may ultimately be made by judicious prospecting in those vicinities.'<sup>232</sup> The inefficient Gormanston branch line was the first casualty of the rationalisation, being closed to traffic on 7 September 1903. Sticht hesitated to close other sections of the line. He advised the Company's Secretary that, while the railway remained a vexed question, it was inappropriate to encourage those inquiring after the rolling stock.<sup>233</sup>

Procrastination over the railway's future continued for several years. Rails and fastenings were progressively removed from the unwanted branch lines and re-deployed on the Abt Railway, as were a number of remodified wagons. Maintenance on the North Mount Lyell railway was kept to the bare minimum. An analysis of the annual returns for the period 1903 – 1912 reveals minor losses every year except for 1906, when a small profit of £286 was returned.<sup>234</sup> If the Mount Lyell Company's accounting procedures are to be believed, then no further profits were forthcoming. According to Sticht, the railway was run 'as a matter of accommodation for the Company and the public, rather than out of consideration of profit.'<sup>235</sup> The Company progressively sold its excess railway rolling stock and retained only the bare necessities to cater for timber, mixed freight and the occasional picnics. The Mounts Jukes and Darwin Fields were

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<sup>231</sup> Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for 1902-3, 1903, paper 31, p. 7.

<sup>232</sup> EC Driffield report to the General Manager concerning the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's Railway, 15 June 1903, Mount Lyell records, Queenstown.

<sup>233</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 4 December 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 326, AOT.

<sup>234</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1906-7, 1908, paper 32, p. 201.

<sup>235</sup> R Sticht Half-yearly report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 18 October 1909, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/325, p. 383, AOT.

not developed. According to the 1914 Mines Department geological survey, all ventures in the area ended in failure.<sup>236</sup>

The railway provided a social facility for the miners and residents of the Linda Valley. Official picnics were held annually from 1903, being held in Crotty until 1906, Darwin in 1907 and then at Kelly Basin up until the early 1920s, by which time the railway had become unsafe to carry the crowded passenger trains. The outings were popular, with 1400 picnic goers attending the 5 February 1908 event at Kelly Basin. The day's social highlights included the "strong playing" of the Linda Brass Band, an aquatic carnival and athletic events for children and adults. Sticht attended the picnic and acknowledged the valuable contribution of the annual outings in maintaining the cordial relations between the company and its employees.<sup>237</sup>

As the timber stocks diminished on the Queenstown side of the divide, the North Mount Lyell line proved to be a valuable asset for the Company. By 1913 the timber traffic showed encouraging increases, with large quantities of mine timber and firewood being cut in the vicinity of Kelly Basin and transported to Linda.<sup>238</sup> In this period the Company built a number of wooden tramways along the railway, some up to two miles long, to access the better stands of timber. A contract was signed with C Doherty to recover timber from about the shores of Macquarie Harbour and to supply to the Kelly Basin rail terminus.<sup>239</sup> Other traffic included coke and coal and the cartage of second hand building materials from the derelict towns of Darwin, Crotty and Pillinger. The branch line into Crotty was retained until 1914 for the recovery of plant and machinery from the defunct smelters.<sup>240</sup>

Timber remained an important resource for the Company and when the Hydro Electric Department contemplated the damming of the King River near Crotty in 1918, Sticht and his senior officers considered employing a rail ferry to carry the valuable commodity across the proposed lake.<sup>241</sup> When in early 1921 the Company considered the temporary closure of its operations due to poor copper prices, Drifffield warned against closing the line. He reasoned that it would be cheaper to continue maintenance works and prevent landslips rather than trying to re-establish the railway once

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<sup>236</sup> L Hills, *The Jukes-Darwin Mining Field*, Geological Survey Bulletin No. 16, Department of Mines, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>237</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 February 1908.

<sup>238</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 August 1912.

<sup>239</sup> Local Superintendent letter to Company Secretary, 19 June 1914, File 5/1/5, Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>240</sup> Local Superintendent letter to Company Secretary, 25 August 1914, File 5/1/5, Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, University of Melbourne Archives

<sup>241</sup> Local Superintendent letter to General Manager, 6 December 1918, Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/55, pp. 480-485, AOT.



operations recommenced.<sup>242</sup> By 1923 timber supplies were depleted between Kelly Basin and Darwin. A small Riley rail motor now handled the dwindling passenger requirements.<sup>243</sup>

In late 1924 the Company applied to Parliament to close the Darwin to Kelly Basin section of railway. The Select Committee supported the Company's application,<sup>244</sup> the matter being formalised with the 13 January 1925 passing of *The North Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Act, 1924*. Use of the remaining Darwin to Linda section also declined. Freight dropped from 9,167 tons in 1926 to 3,565 tons in 1927. In 1928 the railway carried just 1,436 tons.<sup>245</sup> In its application to close the final portion of the railway the Company advised that economic timber reserves had been exhausted. The Select Committee duly recommended that the line be closed.<sup>246</sup> The *North Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Act, 1928*, was passed on 15 January 1929 and by the end of the year the majority of the rails and sleepers had been removed and re-deployed elsewhere on the Company's railway and tramway system.<sup>247</sup>

While the main line railways hauled the heavy freight and passengers to and from the Lyell field, an efficient means of all-weather transport was sought to move the miners, ore and ancillary goods about Mount Lyell and beyond to the isolated outlying settlements.

### **Tramways about Mount Lyell**

This section briefly looks at the effective use of the light weight steam drawn tramways about the Mount Lyell district and the benefits bestowed on the Company by the introduction of an innovative underground electric tramway system.

Whereas railways had been identified as the most efficient method of transport on the West Coast, their high cost of establishment had seen many promising ventures placed on hold for the want of cheaper transport. Pack-tracks and corduroy roads were not suited to the wet conditions. Following the completion of the Strahan to Zeehan

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<sup>242</sup> C Driffield report to General Manager, 9 February 1921, Half-yearly reports of the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/269, pp. 77-78, AOT.

<sup>243</sup> General Manager's Report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 20 October 1923, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, p. 259, AOT.

<sup>244</sup> JPPP, *The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1924*, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, paper 22.

<sup>245</sup> Returns of Railway Statistics for years ended 30 September 1926-1928, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/348, p. 471A, NS 1711/349, p. 299, and NS 1711/350, p. 405, AOT.

<sup>246</sup> JPPP, *The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1928*, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, paper 23.

railway in 1892, the Zeehan mining field prospered. The railway facilitated the opening of numerous mines and a network of lightweight, steam hauled 2' gauge tramways. The first of the lines was the Oceana Tram, which had opened on 18 February 1892 and ran between Argenton and the Oceana Mine.<sup>248</sup> Following suit were the Western Silver Mining Company, its tramway opening 23 July 1892, and the Zeehan Tramway Company, which opened on 6 October 1893. It linked the government's railway station and the Queen End (western) of Zeehan.<sup>249</sup>

Utilising small four and five ton engines and lightweight rails, the tramways were cheap to build and well suited to the tighter confines and steeper terrain. The Geological Surveyor for Tasmania, Alexander Montgomery, was a firm supporter of the tramways. He viewed them as the logical solution to the transport problem, stating:

It will thus be seen that the field is becoming pretty well opened up by tramways, and that much money had been spent on these. The lines are of a substantial character in general, and will be of the greatest service in getting in supplies and machinery, and getting ore out.<sup>250</sup>

The advantages of the tramways were apparent to the principals of the Mount Lyell Company. By early 1895 hundreds of men were employed to construct the 2' gauge tramway system about the smelters site.<sup>251</sup> A German built Krauss locomotive, slightly larger than those used in Zeehan, was imported to assist with the cartage of timber, bricks and materials about the rapidly changing industrial Lyell landscape.<sup>252</sup> Within six months the 1 mile 36 chain "Through Tramway" had been built to connect the smelters and the "Main Haulage" that carried the ore from the Iron Blow. About the smelters 4 miles 30 chains of tramways had been laid to provide access to the Company's limestone quarry, its brickworks, the sawmill and the timber stands in Ragged Creek.<sup>253</sup> Robert Sticht was quick to appreciate the worth of the narrow gauge tramways commenting: 'This system is in continuous use and the 6½ ton loco on hand

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<sup>247</sup> General Manager's Report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 16 October 1929, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/351, p. 183.

<sup>248</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 February 1892.

<sup>249</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 October 1893.

<sup>250</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3: Including Report on the Progress of the Mineral Fields of the County of Montagu, 1893, paper 50, p. 4.

<sup>251</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 February 1895.

<sup>252</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1895, pp. 16-17, Queenstown.

<sup>253</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, pp. 18-19, Queenstown.

has been of the greatest service upon it. Without both, construction would, in fact, have been practically impossible in this precipitous and rugged locality.<sup>254</sup>

The Company relied on the tramways during its early years of operation, particularly when the main line railway system became taxed to the limit and the larger 3' 6" gauge engines could only be used sparingly to haul the firewood, limestone and silica. Management of the tramways was changed on 13 January 1898 from the Reduction Works to the Railway Department in acknowledgement of the growth and importance of the system. It was hoped that improved efficiencies could be achieved under the single jurisdiction.<sup>255</sup> In 1898 the tramways carried 386,871 tons, the following year the figure rose to 389,422 tons before gradually decreasing through 1900 (376,431 tons), 1901 (338,407 tons) and in 1902 to 305,897 tons. Of the freight carried in 1902 the major components included ore (159,862 tons), firewood (47,171 tons), silica (39,673 tons), limestone (24,806 tons), ballast and screenings (10,786 tons) and coke (7,258 tons). The length of the tramways had increased to nearly eleven and a half miles, and the number of locomotives to six Krauss engines, the most recent acquisitions all being 7½ tons and slightly more powerful. The rolling stock had also increased considerably to 329 wagons of mixed type and construction.<sup>256</sup>

In 1899 the North Mount Lyell Company invested in a 2' gauge tramway system, having agreed to supply ore to the Mount Lyell Company as an interim measure while its smelters at Crotty were built. The line was laid from the North Mount Lyell mine, across Philosopher's Ridge, to the summit of the Mount Lyell Company's haulage.<sup>257</sup> The Company purchased a nine-ton Krauss engine which it successfully trialled on 15 June 1900.<sup>258</sup> The Company constructed a second short tramway to connect its mine with the mile long aerial ropeway, which linked to the Linda terminus of the mainline to Kelly Basin.<sup>259</sup> The North Mount Lyell Company also considered extending its tramway on from the Mount Lyell haulage through to Gormanston in order to convey its miners to and from work.<sup>260</sup> The idea proved to be another of the Company's many dreams. Two days after the 22 May 1903 amalgamation of the two companies, Sticht

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<sup>254</sup> General Manager's Report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 21 October 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 357, AOT.

<sup>255</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1898, p. 27, Queenstown.

<sup>256</sup> Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Railway Department Statistics, Report 8 April 1903, NS 726/9, AOT.

<sup>257</sup> Minute Book of the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Limited, Minutes: 23 October 1899, p. 206, AOT.

<sup>258</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 June 1900.

<sup>259</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 November 1900.

<sup>260</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 November 1900.

approved the modification of the tramway across Philosopher's Ridge to improve the transfer of ore and equipment between the smelters and the North Mount Lyell Mine.<sup>261</sup> This tramway remained in operation until the completion of the North Mount Lyell tunnel and the subsequent 4 September 1928 diversion of ore via the underground electric tramway.<sup>262</sup>

The light tramways about Mount Lyell provided sterling service and as the Company's activities expand into the outlying areas. By 1913 the network had grown to twenty-one miles. The Company gradually upgraded its Krauss locomotives, with four of the 10-ton variety purchased between 1906 and 1911, the tenth and last of these engines arriving in March 1911.<sup>263</sup> Tonnages carried on the system remained constant through to 1910, with over 300,000 tons recorded annually. The period 1911 (247,387 tons), 1912 (158,725 tons) and 1913 (214,764 tons) saw figures diminish through a combination of factors, including strikes, the North Mount Lyell fire and the scarcity of labour in the region.<sup>264</sup> A workers' train service was implemented on 28 May 1912 to improve the miners' working conditions. Sticht, while wary of the costs arising from the exercise, considered 'the innovation may contribute to a certain accession to the number of men proffering their services at the mines.'<sup>265</sup>

Over ensuing years several of the early horse drawn tramways that had been built to access timber stands were upgraded to use of the narrow gauge steam locomotives. Extensions to the Howard's Plains tramway, originally built in 1903, commenced in July 1912 and were sufficiently completed by February 1913 to enable work to commence on the Lake Margaret Power Scheme.<sup>266</sup> Linked to the smelters in the Queen River Valley by a short haulage line, the seven mile Lake Margaret tramway provided direct access to the intervening timber belts as well the Lake Margaret village, located on the Yolande River. A special motor service was implemented for children to commute to school in Queenstown. The service was not always reliable, on occasions

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<sup>261</sup> W Batchelor report to R Sticht, 27 May 1903, Periodic Reports of the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/281, p. 392, AOT.

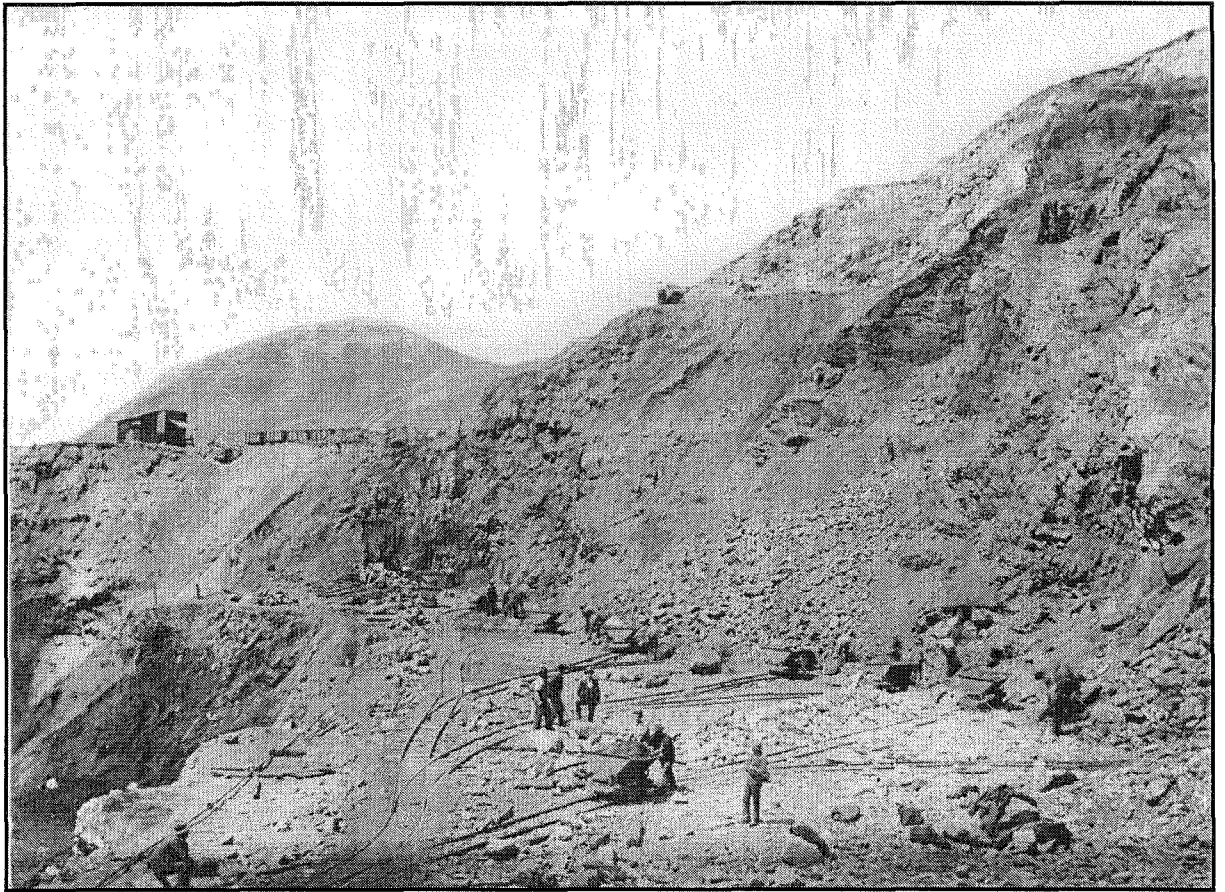
<sup>262</sup> R Murray report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 19 October 1928, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/350, p. 170, AOT.

<sup>263</sup> General Manager to Superintending Engineer, 13 March 1911, Railway Department Letterbook, NS 1711/847, pp. 6-7, AOT.

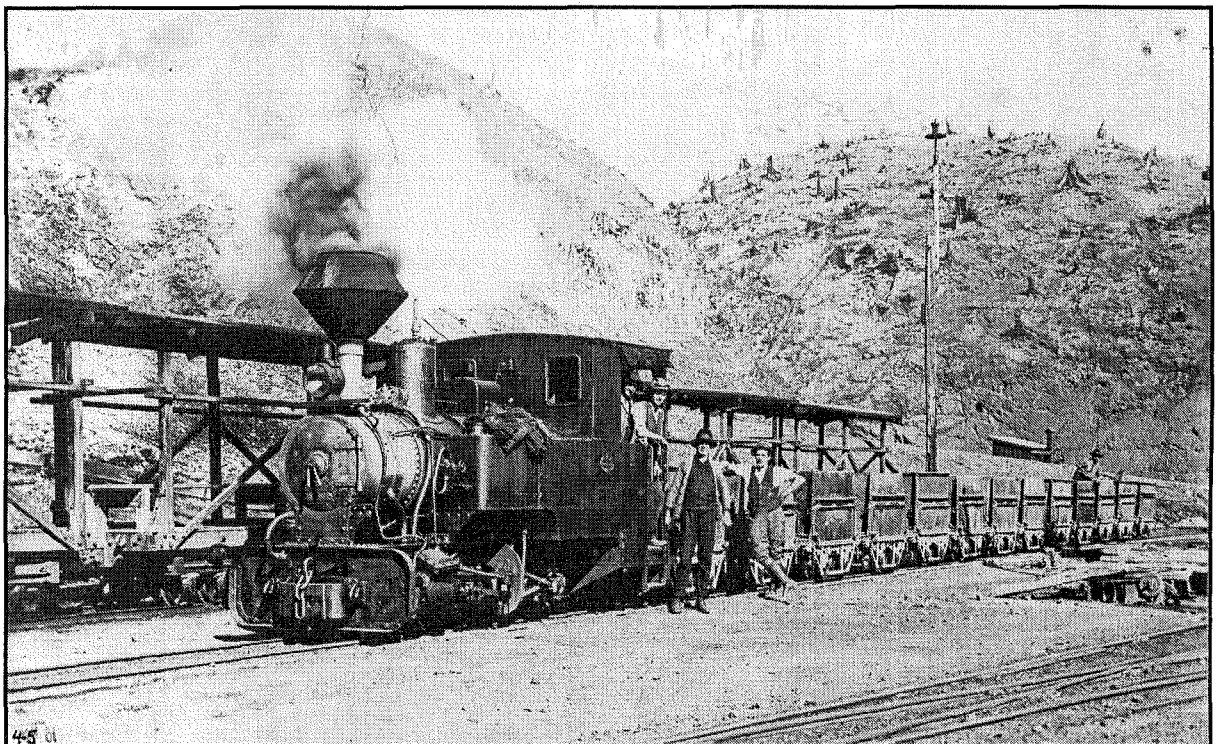
<sup>264</sup> Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Railway Department Statistics, Report 6 February 1914, NS 726/5, AOT.

<sup>265</sup> General Manager to Superintending Engineer, 29 May 1912, Railway Department Letterbook, NS 1711/847, pp. 192-193, AOT.

<sup>266</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 March 1915.



**BENCH WORKING AT MOUNT LYELL MINE – c. 1902**



**10 TON KRAUSS LOCOMOTIVE AT MOUNT LYELL WORKS – c. 1920**

the children had to 'tramp the whole distance to Lake Margaret and home; and some of them are only six or seven years old.'<sup>267</sup>

The second wooden tramway to be upgraded was the old firewood tram, originally built in 1896, which followed the east fork of the Queen River.<sup>268</sup> It was extended to the head of the Queen River Valley in 1913, from where a short horse drawn tramway connected to the mines in the Lyell Comstock Valley. The mining operations were low key up until the Mount Lyell Company began processing the low grade copper ore at its newly developed flotation plant. Ore transport commenced on 9 February 1916.<sup>269</sup> The following year the population of the small village had grown to between sixty and seventy people. A passenger service was introduced to facilitate access between Queenstown and the isolated mining community. A commodious carriage, capable of carrying twenty-five passengers, was built for the tramway.<sup>270</sup> In the latter half of 1918 the Mount Lyell Company extended the line through to the mine, saving the need to double handle the ore. Daily workers trains were provided between Queenstown and the mine as it was very difficult to attract workers to live in an area that was frequently subject to heavy winter snow and a rainfall of 140" a year.<sup>271</sup> By 1930 the Mount Lyell Company's 2' gauge steam tramway system had reached its peak, with a total of twenty-nine miles in service.<sup>272</sup>

The first electrified tramways on the West Coast occurred in 1903 when the Mount Lyell Company electrified part of its South Tharsis tramway. The Company manufactured many components of the small electric locomotive in its Queenstown workshops and installed power poles from the powerhouse through to the Lyell Tharsis ore bins.<sup>273</sup> Sticht reported on 13 November 1903 that the electric loco had been tested 'under service conditions, with satisfactory results.'<sup>274</sup> No further reference is made to the locomotive or the electrified tramway, the surface operations at the South Tharsis Mine having been suspended before the 11 August 1903 engine tests. Underground

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<sup>267</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 September 1917.

<sup>268</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 31 January 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 172, AOT.

<sup>269</sup> Superintending Engineer to General Manager, 11 April 1916, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/332, p. 446, AOT.

<sup>270</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 July 1917.

<sup>271</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 January 1920.

<sup>272</sup> Report prepared by R Murray for the Development and Migration Commission, 7 March 1930, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/351, p. 452, AOT.

<sup>273</sup> R Sticht report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 21 August 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 52, AOT.

<sup>274</sup> R Sticht report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 6 November 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, pp. 257-258, AOT.

exploration at the South Tharsis mine had ceased by the end of the year.<sup>275</sup> Elsewhere on the West Coast, the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company electrified its 3' gauge tramway in 1907. The one and a quarter mile long line tramway connected the Mount Bischoff mine with the Waratah treatment works.<sup>276</sup> The following year the Company electrified its underground tramway operations.<sup>277</sup>

The introduction of the underground electric railway at Mount Lyell proved a boon. The idea was first mooted in 1903 by Edward Peters who had proposed the construction of an underground haulage system between the Iron Blow and the smelters.<sup>278</sup> Less than a decade later Lamartine Trent, the North Mount Lyell Company's metallurgist, prepared plans for a deep tunnel on the Lyell field. His ambitious strategy was to build an underground connection between the North Lyell Mine and the Mount Lyell Company's smelters, to be implemented if his Company assumed control of the Mount Lyell operations.<sup>279</sup> Neither plan progressed. Work on the North Lyell tunnel commenced in February 1927 under Murray's scheme to rationalise operational costs and commence mining on a large scale. The tunnel eliminated the practice of hauling the ore to the surface and the loading of it into trucks for the circuitous trip, via the North Mount Lyell tramway and the Main Haulage, to the processing plant. Construction on the 6,920' tunnel was carried out simultaneously from both ends, its 1 in 200 downhill grade from the mine being designed for moving heavy loads. Considered the most innovative undertaking in the history of Tasmanian mining, the Saturday 26 May 1928 joining of the two ends was an important occasion for the Company.<sup>280</sup>

The 2' gauge electrified tramway was commissioned on 4 September 1928. It was powered by two imported nine-ton Siemens locomotives. The North Lyell tunnel 'eliminated the geographical separation of the Company's mining from the rest of its local activities.'<sup>281</sup> A jubilant Murray reported to the Chairman a year later that the North Lyell Tunnel had fully demonstrated its efficiency. Not only had the expected economies been realised, but the new facilities for ore handling and transport had

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<sup>275</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1904, p. 18, Queenstown.

<sup>276</sup> L Rae, *A History of Railways and Tramways on Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, L Rae, 1986, pp. 172-177.

<sup>277</sup> L Rae, 'Early Australian Electric Locomotives – Part 5: Mt Bischoff Underground Locomotives', *LRRSA*, No. 108, April 1990, pp. 29-30.

<sup>278</sup> Report by ED Peters, 15 May 1893, pp. 20-21.

<sup>279</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 270.

<sup>280</sup> *Advocate*, 28 May 1928.

<sup>281</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1928, p. 3, Queenstown.

enabled the mine's output to be significantly increased.<sup>282</sup> Another advantage of the underground system was its close proximity to other ore bodies. These were connected to the electrified system. The increases in traffic warranted the purchase of a third locomotive in 1929, the full upgrading of the waggon fleet and the purchase of a fourth locomotive in 1935, and underground connections to the Royal Tharsis and West Lyell orebodies.<sup>283</sup>

The lightweight tramways provided a valuable and efficient service for the Mount Lyell Company, moving large quantities of goods and passengers about the district. In some instances they were the only lines of communication to isolated outposts, providing an integral role in reducing the isolation of these communities.

## Conclusions

In his 1928 study on Tasmanian railways, Torliev Hytten contended that the three crucial factors determining rail construction were topography, competition from water transport and the economic resources available to the railway. Hytten considered that railways should adopt the line of least resistance – the shortest and the quickest. Where mountain barriers were encountered, he suggested that it may be both quicker and less expensive to take a longer route around an obstacle rather than attempt to cross it. He advised that steep grades and sharp curves should be avoided, the alternatives being high embankments, deep cuttings and tunnels.<sup>284</sup> The Mount Lyell Company did not share Hytten's philosophy and selected the shortest route available, employed steep grades and avoided the use of tunnels. Its approach to railway construction was both innovative and refreshing. It built the first rack railway system in Australia, successfully handling the 1 in 16 grades where the norm for conventional railways was 1 in 40 for Tasmania. The railway effectively conquered the difficult country by employing an unusually high number of lightweight wooden trestle bridges to span the deep gullies and hug the steep sidelings.

To compete with water transport, the Company manipulated competitive terms through the clever orchestration of its trade through the ports of Strahan and Emu Bay. The Company negotiated low shipping rates with the Union Steamship Company and maintained reasonable rail tariffs on the Emu Bay Railway, as both entities sought to capture a steady load of traffic from the copper producer. For a brief moment the

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<sup>282</sup> R Murray report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 16 October 1929, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/351, p. 165, AOT.

<sup>283</sup> Report from Mine Engineer to General Manager, 8 October 1935, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/358, p. 201, AOT.



railway did face a battle for domination, but one by one its opponents fell by the way, with none able to wrest the lucrative mineral trade from the Company's clutches. The one significant challenge to materialise was the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's conventionally-built railway, which failed dismally. Its inexperienced management regime had not anticipated the demands of the isolated environment nor was it able to implement effective decisions from afar. To the victor, the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company, the rewards were considerable. The significant profits earned by the railway were carefully hidden from the government, shareholders and the Lyell community alike, with management quietly ploughing the money into other operational areas, to be ultimately paid as dividends to those lucky enough to have shares during the boom years.

The Abt Railway survived and prospered. "We find a way or make it" became a catch-cry amongst West Coasters. In a land where fortune favoured the brave, the Mount Lyell Company and its railway stood tall. Not only did the railway provide a valuable freight service for the Company, it also provided "the civilising factor." Over the years the Company successfully utilised the railway as a medium for providing relief from the monotony of daily chores and the depressing surroundings by offering discounted excursions to Strahan and beyond. Just twenty-two miles long, the Mount Lyell railway produced some of the highest returns per mile of any railway operated in Australia.

Over the years the Mount Lyell Company operated an extensive system of steam railways and tramways about Mount Lyell. It pioneered the use of rack railways in Australia, the only other example being that of the Queensland Government Railway's line from Kabra to Mount Morgan. Shorter than the Mount Lyell railway, the Mount Morgan line featured a one mile thirty five chain section of Abt System. It opened 25 November 1898 and served the Mount Morgan Gold Mining Company and associated communities until its April 1952 closure.<sup>285</sup> The Mount Lyell Company continued to use its Abt Railway up until 10 August 1963.<sup>286</sup> Patsy Adam-Smith's words were most applicable to the Lyell communities:

There was little of our living, our workaday or social life that was not affected by the lonesome whistle that winkled its way into every corner of the land, bringing a whiff of other places, other people. It was the daily - or weekly - reminder that we isolated ones were not alone.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Hytten, 'A Study in railway economics,' pp. 1-8.

<sup>285</sup> Jehan, *Rack Railways of Australia*, pp. 35-54.

<sup>286</sup> L Rae, *The Abt Railway, Tasmania's West Coast Wilderness Railway*, Hobart, 2003, p. 65.

<sup>287</sup> P Adam-Smith, *When we rode the Rails*, Sydney, Lansdowne, 1983, p. 11.

The success of the Mount Lyell Company's railway operation arose from efficient management and a guaranteed volume of freight and passenger traffic. It was protected against competition through the isolated nature of the region. The rugged terrain and inclement weather acted as a barrier, keeping competition at bay. Many government branchlines and privately operated railways enjoyed these same advantages, but where the decision to build had not been based on sound economic grounds, they were left vulnerable to later road competition. On railways, Robson observes:

Their power to advance the prosperity of the state and enrich its people continued to be conventional wisdom although it was clear by the end of the nineteenth century that such lines were not going to pay their way. Yet local pressure demanded them and members of parliament responded.<sup>288</sup>

The challenges faced in resolving the transport problems within the hostile environs had been considerable, but living within the constraints and suffering the day to day hardships presented a vast array of adversities for those attempting to work and survive within "The Lost Province," as outlined in the following chapters.

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<sup>288</sup> L Robson, *A History of Tasmania – Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 271.

## CHAPTER 6: OVERCOMING THE ODDS – 1893-1935

### Introduction

When Robert Sticht, newly appointed Chief Metallurgist, first arrived at Mount Lyell in March 1895 he met with primitive living conditions, inadequate transport facilities and abysmal weather. The land had the appearance of “the last frontier.” About Mount Lyell and to the east were hundreds of square miles which had ‘so far never felt the impress of a civilised being’s boot.’<sup>1</sup> Coming to grips with the natural elements presented many challenges for the explorers, settlers and industrialists who lived and worked in the region. The storms and floods caused many headaches for the Lyell population. In some years there were more than 240 wet days and rainfall regularly surpassed 100 inches. Nevertheless, water was a vital ingredient to the success of the Lyell region. It was a valuable asset in mining and processing operations, generating hydro-electric power, reducing the spread of disease and for everyday domestic consumption. This chapter outlines the damage and inconvenience caused by the downpours, the day to day uses of water and, finally, the innovative applications for which it was harnessed.

While the rain could be utilised for the benefit of the population, the frequent bush fires wreaked havoc. Raging unabated about the hills and valleys, whipped by fierce winds, they were difficult to contain. So repetitive did they become, Sticht advised his Board in December 1898 that the area was suffering from its ‘annual attack of this Summer complaint.’<sup>2</sup> With the vegetation eventually burnt out, the barren land was subjected to fierce winds, turning the district into a dust bowl. Added to these natural disasters were the made-made environmental calamities caused by excessive timber-cutting activities, toxic sulphur emissions and the dumping of mining by-products into the Queen River. These items have been covered in Chapter Two. Despite the many physical adversities, the local spirit prevailed. Slowly the community began to make small inroads, overcoming the monotony of the elements through the application of sport, social occasions and improved amenities. This chapter examines the broader activities and hobbies that provided temporary relief from the hostile environment.

Aside from the physical environment, the Mount Lyell Company faced a broad range of labour related challenges in its early years of operation. The Company’s policy of employing contract miners at its Iron Blow mine placed it in direct confrontation with

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<sup>1</sup> *Zeelan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1895.

the Amalgamated Miners' Association (AMA) following its takeover of the rival North Mount Lyell operations in 1903. A second long-term problem confronting the Company was its inability to attract skilled workers. Two issues, health and unions, would become inextricably linked. This chapter looks at the methods by which the experienced heads within the Mount Lyell Company manipulated the provision of health benefits to the detriment of the AMA. The union threat temporarily aside, the Company was still to deal with the underlying problems that made living in the region tedious to the extreme. Social amenities were lacking, particularly for women and children. From the beginning the Company had been reticent to become involved in personal welfare issues, preferring to focus on civic matters. By improving the general facilities and services to the various communities, living conditions reached a reasonable standard. Details of the various civic improvements provided by the Company are provided in the following chapter.

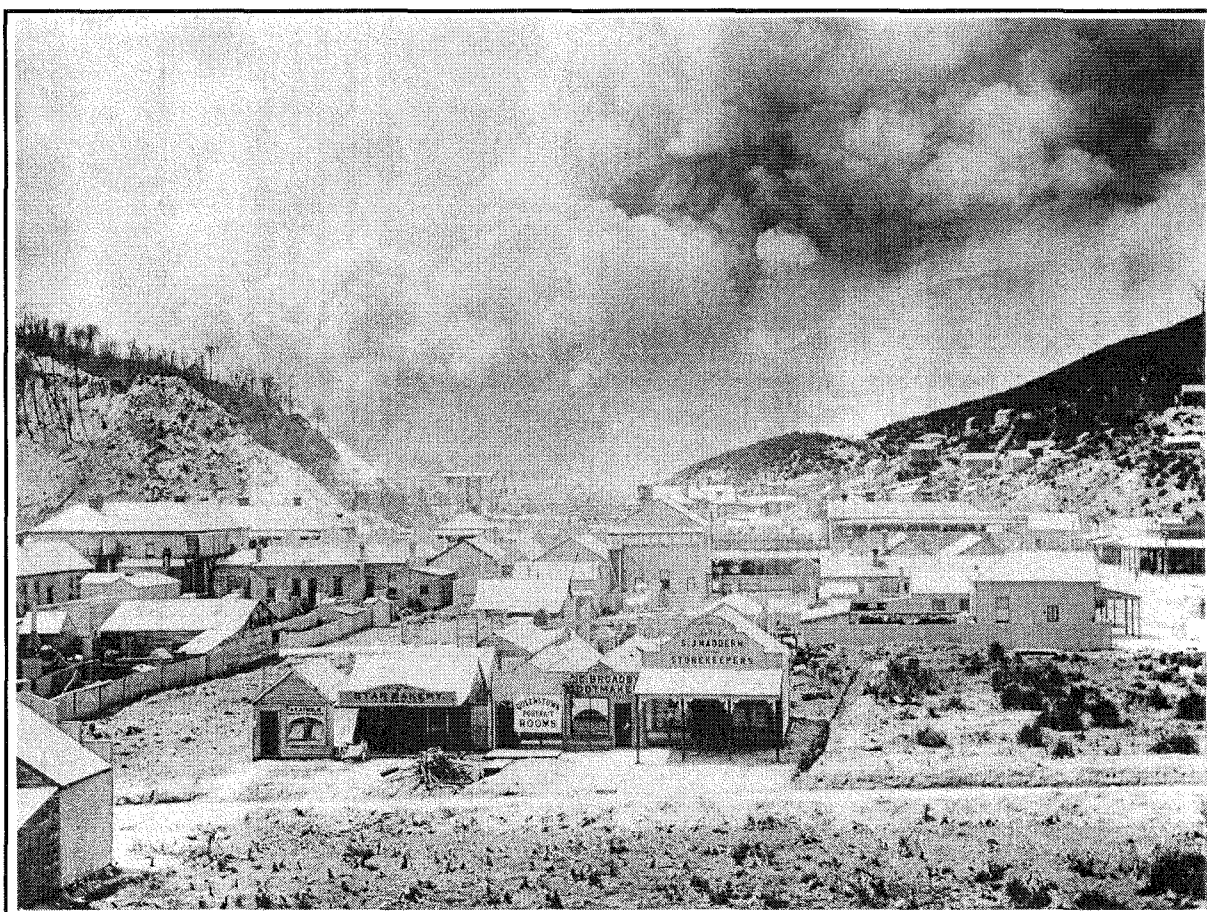
Around 1909 Sticht observed the slow breakdown of the family unit. A combination of poor climate, substandard housing, a lack of social outlets, and a high cost of living saw women and children leave the district for warmer climates. Consequently, married men could neither be retained nor attracted to work at Mount Lyell. General discontent spread to the unions. Several strikes and the horrific fire in the North Lyell mine followed in quick succession. In response to the worsening situation, the Company committed to a policy of social welfare for its employees, which it introduced with outstanding success. The Company was the first of its kind in Tasmania to attempt such a large-scale welfare enterprise. The innovative methods adopted by the Company to promote workplace harmony and raise the general living standards in the Lyell region are outlined and examined in the latter half of this chapter.

### **Weathering the Elements – Rain, Fire and Wind**

The following section examines the hardships endured by the early settlers and mining companies about the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region as they battled nature. Fire and floods presented considerable dangers and disadvantages for the isolated communities. Ways are outlined by which the communities and the Mount Lyell Company coped with adversity and adapted to their surroundings.

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<sup>2</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 30 December 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, Non-State Records (NS) 1711/314, p. 895, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).



**DUST AND SMOKE AT QUEENSTOWN – c. 1898**



**TORNADO DAMAGE, QUEENSTOWN – OCTOBER 1918**

Within weeks of his March 1895 arrival on the West Coast, Robert Sticht expressed surprise at the neglect of the Tasmanian mining industry.<sup>3</sup> His comments were understandable. Sticht's structured mining background in America had not prepared him for the primitive and trying conditions he now faced, something akin to the frontier conditions of early America. He found the amenities about Mount Lyell to be virtually nonexistent, the transport lacking, the bush impenetrable and the weather totally inhospitable. Christopher Binks comments that the battle to establish mining on the West Coast had been 'a drama played out amongst forested valleys and mountains and along exposed shores, out of sight and largely unnoticed by the rest of the colony.'<sup>4</sup> Sticht soon realised that it would be difficult for the Company to retain competent men amid the oppressive surroundings unless the situation was improved. He sought the Board's approval to provide three weeks annual leave for his staff. Sticht believed this to be a reasonable request: 'considering the awfulness of this spot as an abode this perquisite seems but a humane concession here.'<sup>5</sup>

From the outset, the persistent rainfall interrupted Sticht's activities, to the extent that he sought to clarify the terms of his employment within a month of arriving:

The only amendment which I should like the Board to recognize at its pleasure is that the period of twelve months within which I am to erect and demonstrate the technical and financial success of "Pyritic Smelting", be interpreted to mean twelve working months. That is, that I be not held responsible for time lost by the entire suspension of building and construction operations owing to the heavy rainfalls, for weeks at a time.<sup>6</sup>

The weather extremes became a regular topic of conversation. After the sulphur fumes, Blainey describes the heavy rainfall as "the second curse," with the high number of rainy days reaching legendary status.<sup>7</sup> The frequent misrepresentation of the local climate drew a defensive Charles Whitham to comment that 'when any man or woman, country, or institution has a bad reputation, be sure that popular report will exaggerate it...so it is with our Western rainfall. People will tell you with melancholy satisfaction that it rains three to four yards every year, and that each shower lasts twelve months! But there has been no year at Queenstown when it has rained on more than 240 days, and the average is about 200.'<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the rainfall figures for the period 1919 to

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<sup>3</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 5 April 1895.

<sup>4</sup> CJ Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 June 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 517, AOT.

<sup>6</sup> R Sticht letter to Board of Directors, 27 April 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 7, AOT.

<sup>7</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> C Whitham, *Western Tasmania-A Land of Riches and Beauty*, Queenstown, Robert Sticht Memorial Library, 1949 (reprint of 1923 edition), p. 48.

1935 shows Regatta Point recorded a low of 41.87" in 1932 and a high of 80.44" in 1924, Kelly Basin 61.11" (1922) and 92.47" (1923), Queenstown 67.00" (1934) and 119.56" (1931), the Mount Lyell mine 81.80" (1934) and 143.06" (1931), and Lake Margaret a minimum of 101.47" (1934) and a maximum of 176.02" (1924).<sup>9</sup> Whitham may have also had a blinkered view of his beloved West Coast. Between 1923 and 1935 the number of rainy days in Queenstown exceeded 240 on seven occasions, with the maximum of 270 wet days recorded in 1931.<sup>10</sup>

Life in the wet climate at Queenstown created considerable discomfort for the women and children. In October 1909 Sticht advised his Board that the staff cottages were becoming overcrowded and, as a result, domestic life was suffering. He noted the unwillingness of the wives to live in the inclement climate, particularly when the greater portion of their lives was spent in-doors, amid cramped conditions. Sticht considered the situation was becoming more pronounced and he was disturbed to see the women pack up their children and move to sunnier places. The harshness of the family separations did not augur well for staff retention. Sticht believed that unless the Company treated its deserving employees and their families liberally the problem would become more acute.<sup>11</sup>

Heavy deluges led to inevitable flooding about the region, particularly within the poorly drained construction camps. The 12 May 1895 flash flood in the Queen River created havoc within the tent settlement of Queen Crossing and around the Company's new smelters site.<sup>12</sup> On 23 April the following year floodwaters from a nearby creek broached the railway camp at Hall's Creek, burying workers huts and swamping the boarding and business houses.<sup>13</sup> The low-lying residential area of West Strahan experienced its share of floods, particularly at times of high tide in Macquarie Harbour. The specially built storm channel was of little assistance when rising floodwaters in the Harbour flowed back through the settlement on 27 April 1903, submerging many properties.<sup>14</sup>

In some instances the Mount Lyell Company was directly blamed for contributing to flood damage by degrading the natural environment. A particularly bad flood in the

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<sup>9</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company (MLMRC) Annual Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Years ending 1919 to 1935, Queenstown.

<sup>10</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30 September 1931, p. 24, Queenstown.

<sup>11</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 October 1909, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pages unnumbered, AOT.

<sup>12</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 May 1895.

<sup>13</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1903.

Queenstown area on Sunday 15 April 1906 led to unprecedented devastation throughout the region. Bridges and wooden flumes were washed away and the railway line to Strahan was severed in three places between Lynchford and Queenstown. The rapid run-off from the hills was exacerbated by the combination of years of excessive woodcutting, the emission of noxious sulphur fumes from the smelters, bush fires and the consequential erosion that had rendered the once heavily wooded slopes bereft of vegetation. Sticht acknowledged this fact, advising the Company Secretary that 'needless to say the devastation is accounted for largely through the freedom offered to the running away of the water by the bareness of the ground, especially the hill sides.'<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the 15 April damage, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* asserted that the Company's emptying of the heavy slag into the Queen River had raised the level of the riverbed, contributing significantly to the destruction of the bridges and other property.<sup>16</sup> The paper noted that the forced closure of the railway had rendered the Lyell district totally isolated.<sup>17</sup> At the railway town of Dubbil Barril, located on the banks of the King River, the waters rose to such an extent the cottages stood in seven feet of water.<sup>18</sup> A little over two months later the railway was again closed after a cloudburst produced two and a half inches of rain in two hours about the Teepookana to Strahan area.<sup>19</sup> Repeat floods at Dubbil Barril in May 1908 saw the three railway cottages again inundated, causing the Company to remove the buildings to higher ground.<sup>20</sup>

The population gradually became more attuned to the environment. Drainage systems and other preventative measures were implemented about the settlements. A particularly heavy storm, occurring on Thursday 27 April 1916, saw 4.5" fall over 24 hours in Queenstown. Similar amounts were recorded in the Henty and Strahan areas. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* reported that the manmade embankments along the Henty River had contained the floodwaters, while in West Strahan the storm channel had coped with the swiftly flowing current. At Queenstown the runoff was contained within the creeks and rivulets, although much of the top dressing was washed away from the roads. The only major disturbance was the cancellation of the morning train to

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<sup>15</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 20 April 1906, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, pp. 816-825, AOT.

<sup>16</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 April 1906.

<sup>17</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 April 1906.

<sup>18</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 20 April 1906, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, p. 819, AOT.

<sup>19</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 June 1906.

<sup>20</sup> Half yearly report by the Superintending Engineer to the General Manager, 14 October 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/324, p. 348, AOT.



Regatta Point because the floodwaters in the King River had risen two feet over the rails on the Iron Bridge at Teepookana and five feet over the formation lower down the river.<sup>21</sup> Unpredictable cloudbursts were always of concern to the mining companies and residents located near the larger creeks about Mount Lyell. With no vegetation or soil to absorb the rain, the impact of the runoff water was immediate and potentially life threatening. A severe electrical storm of less than half an hour at Mount Lyell on 6 March 1917, saw floodwaters sweep away buildings and submerge a house at the base of the Main Haulage, the three inhabitants saved by the heroics of a Mr Raun.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from occasional land slips and the 1906 flood, the railway escaped major damage during the period under review. When the King River carried large amounts of flood debris, care was taken to ensure it did not bank up behind the bridges. Flood levels in the King River often peaked at times of high tides, causing the excess water to backup far upstream. Such was the case in May 1935 when the floodwaters rose three feet above the decking on the Iron Bridge.<sup>23</sup> Two years later it reached a record height of five feet over the decking.<sup>24</sup> On both occasions, after the floodwaters subsided, only minor cleanups were needed. The Lyell area suffered from other forms of weather extremities, including severe snowstorms,<sup>25</sup> a hurricane,<sup>26</sup> and a tornado.<sup>27</sup> The fluctuating conditions are amplified in Sticht's report for the period March to September 1908: 'the Half-year has been fully characteristic of the great variability of the local weather, heavy floods and cold, tempestuous days – marking it as usual, as well as, towards the end, quite summery spells.'<sup>28</sup>

On the few occasions the region suffered extended dry periods the inconveniences were severe. The conversion to hydro-electric power in November 1914 created a strong reliance on electricity generated by the Lake Margaret power station. Few problems were experienced until the summer of 1933/34, when an unprecedented period of low rainfall continued well into winter, depleting the storage at the Lake Margaret dam. Without water to drive the turbines, power production ceased. Ore processing

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<sup>21</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1916.

<sup>22</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 March 1917.

<sup>23</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 21 May 1935, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/357, p. 421, AOT.

<sup>24</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 5 May 1937, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/360, pp. 197-198, AOT - In early May 1937 some 4.82" of rain fell in Queenstown and 7.10" at Lake Margaret (a record) in 24 hours.

<sup>25</sup> General Manager's Half-yearly report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 18 October 1909, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/325, p. 384, AOT.

<sup>26</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 September 1915.

<sup>27</sup> *Examiner*, 24 October 1918.

<sup>28</sup> General Manager's Half-yearly report to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 16 October 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/324, p. 346, AOT.

operations had to be suspended on two occasions. The shutdowns lasted a total of twelve weeks, 10 March to 30 April and 4 June to 11 July, during the forty-year, all-time, rainfall low.<sup>29</sup> Without sufficient work, the Company was forced to temporarily lay off 500 men in March<sup>30</sup> and 950 men on the second occasion in June.<sup>31</sup>

A regular supply of water was essential to mineral processing, and was a major factor in siting the Company's smelters close to permanent creeks and the Queen River. To supplement water flows, particularly in the drier summer months, the Company built a number of flumes and channels in and around the local hills to facilitate the gravity feeding of water to its mill. In 1893 T Alexander Allen identified the potential of the Lake Margaret water supply.<sup>32</sup> Specialist consultant, Edward Peters, advocated harnessing the water for power generation.<sup>33</sup> In September 1895 Sticht envisaged the move to large-scale mining operations would see the Company produce hydro-electricity from Lake Margaret in the near future.<sup>34</sup> In 1896 Sticht reviewed the situation. He considered the conversion to hydro-electricity was impractical as appropriate processing machinery had not been developed. While not dismissing the hydro-electricity option, Sticht favoured the short term harnessing of the Lake Margaret water by transporting it via flumes or pipes to the smelters and then using it to directly drive the machinery.<sup>35</sup>

Although the scheme did not come to fruition, the Company was able to prevent other mining concerns from gaining access to the water supply.<sup>36</sup> The Company's strategy of hoarding the water rights proved expeditious. Several years later its arch-rival, the North Mount Lyell Copper Company, was forced to locate its smelters some distance away from its mine to access sufficient water for its processing operations. By 1899 the Mount Lyell Company dominated the ownership of the water rights to nearly

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<sup>29</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1934, p. 15, Queenstown.

<sup>30</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 13 March 1934, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/356, pp. 106-107, AOT.

<sup>31</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 19 June 1934, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/356, p. 274, AOT.

<sup>32</sup> TA Allen, Report on the Mount Lyell Mine, 9 May 1893, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Report by ED Peters on the property of The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited, 15 May 1893, Mount Lyell Company records, Queenstown, pp. 26-27.

<sup>34</sup> R Sticht letter to A Harrison, 19 September 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 262, AOT.

<sup>35</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 15 October 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, pp. 888-892, AOT.

<sup>36</sup> R Sticht letter to the Hon. NJ Brown, 2 February 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/313, pp. 261-262, AOT.

all of the major creeks and rivulets about the Mount Lyell district.<sup>37</sup> In an innovative move, excess water from the steep slopes was harnessed for transport purposes. By experimenting with grades, angles and shapes, the Company designed wooden flumes to convey the hewn billets of timber from the hillside forests to the railways and tramways in the valleys below. Under the watchful eye of Carus Drifffield, a network of the V-shaped flumes and channels was extended about the Queen River Valley. The first major flume was seventy chains in length and was built in 1906 at Lynch's Creek, near the Lynchford railway station. The wooden flumes proved a very successful medium to transport the billets about the rugged terrain. They could carry one ton of wood per minute with a water volume of nine cubic feet per second.<sup>38</sup>

Lake Margaret was one of several catchment areas in the region considered suitable for a hydro-electric power scheme. A decade after the demise of the North Mount Lyell Company's smelters at Crotty, the Mount Lyell Company investigated the possibility of damming the King River near the old smelter's site. It hoped to utilise the power for the treatment of its newly-acquired Mount Read and Rosebery zinc deposits. During 1916 the Hydro-Electric Department investigated both the Franklin and King Rivers, the latter option being favoured as it could be developed with minimum expense.<sup>39</sup> Its large catchment area of between 200 and 220 square miles, and high annual rainfall of 115", indicated that power could be produced at a cost on a par with the highly successful Great Lake Scheme.<sup>40</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* expressed extreme optimism for the future of the region. It considered the King River Scheme, when developed, would 'be the most extensive in connection with Australian mining, and that consequently the West Coast of Tasmania will enter upon a new industrial era of permanent and increasing prosperity.'<sup>41</sup> The early confidence proved misplaced. Further exploration showed the dam site to be less than ideal. Several nearby smaller sites were also investigated, including the Lower King and the Yolande Rivers.<sup>42</sup> The King River Scheme was officially placed on hold in 1919, pending the outcome of the ore processing developments at Rosebery.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> R. Sticht letter to the Hon. N.J. Brown, 12 October 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/313, pp. 923-925, AOT.

<sup>38</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 June 1910.

<sup>39</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Hydro-Electric Department, Report for 1916-17, 1917, paper 17, pp. 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Report on proposed preliminary works in connection with a Hydro-Electric Power Scheme at King River, 1917, paper 35, pp. 1-7.

<sup>41</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 September 1917.

<sup>42</sup> JPPP, Hydro-Electric Department, Report for 1917-18, 1918, paper 27, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 July 1919.

Dry periods caused much angst for the various Gormanston ore milling companies in the Linda Valley that did not have access to water. In the summer months the rain was welcomed, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* observing:

The timely rain was also a boon to several mining companies, not a few of whom were, for want of it, metaphorically, on their last legs. So kind, indeed, to the West Coast are the powers having charge of the recurrence of rain that one is often forced to the conclusion that the god of the elements must have stood sponsor for this portion of Tasmania at the time of its christening.<sup>44</sup>

Aside from industrial uses, water was an everyday necessity. The heavy rainfall readily served the developing towns about Mount Lyell, both as a water supply and as a flushing agent for human waste. The unhealthy conditions experienced in early Queenstown were potentially life-threatening, the *Mount Lyell Standard* noting:

Not only typhoid fever, but scarlet fever, small-pox and other dread zymotic diseases would, we fear, be common here if the weather were not so wet. The frequent rains cleanse the air, which is an active medium for the dissemination of filth particles and deadly micro-organisms. For this reason the heavy rainfall is a blessing, although it is so often cursed.<sup>45</sup>

Typhoid fever was a major problem for the emerging towns on the West Coast. Hence it was paramount to have a permanent supply of pure water. In Queenstown the problem was exacerbated by the high incidence of airborne pollution which rendered tank water from the roofs unsuitable for drinking.<sup>46</sup> The dumping of night soil and other household waste close to domestic reservoirs contributed significantly to several early outbreaks of typhoid fever in Queenstown. In 1897 Queenstown recorded 57 incidences of typhoid, the third highest in Tasmania behind Hobart (116) and Beaconsfield (81) and well in excess of any other West Coast town.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, a new dam site was chosen for the town's water supply on Roaring Meg Creek. The catchment was distant from houses, offered pure, reliable water, and provided a good head of pressure for fire fighting.<sup>48</sup> Construction on the 2,000,000 gallon dam commenced 19 January 1899 and, along with the laying of the permanent main, work was completed in April. The *Mount Lyell Standard* considered the completion of the scheme to be a milestone in the town's progress.<sup>49</sup>

Keen to avoid a repetition of Queenstown's typhoid problems, the Gormanston Town Board approved the installation of an open flume system in July 1900 to carry the fresh drinking water from the nearby Owen Creek to a holding tank. It could then be

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<sup>44</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 31 December 1902.

<sup>45</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 November 1897.

<sup>46</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 October 1897.

<sup>47</sup> JPPP, Central Board of Health: Report for the Year 1897, 1898, paper 44, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 October 1898.

<sup>49</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 April 1899.

reticulated about the town. A second tank on a lower level was used to supply the nearby township of Linda. The water scheme was well advanced by May 1901.<sup>50</sup> The residents of Pillinger were not so fortunate. Major outbreaks during 1899 saw half of the population ill with typhoid fever. The Queenstown, Strahan and Zeehan hospitals were filled with patients from Pillinger.<sup>51</sup> Without a Town Board to effect the necessary works, the North Mount Lyell Company undertook to supply water to the town. In March 1901 the *Mount Lyell Standard* advised that Pillinger now had 'a permanent supply of beautifully clear water at its doors; indeed, there is sufficient water to supply a dozen towns of its size.'<sup>52</sup>

Unlike the rainfall, it was not possible to harness or derive benefits from the early bushfires that plagued the Lyell region. So frequently did the fires ravage the countryside that within a few years the population began to treat them as an inevitable curse. The combination of hot weather, rugged terrain and thick vegetation made fire control difficult. The fires generally raged unabated throughout the area. Commenting on the 23 December 1899 inferno that encircled Queenstown, the *Mount Lyell Standard* commented that:

It would appear to be portion of Queenstown's destiny to be the victim of the elements. The rain bears down upon it through long months of the year with a steadiness which could only have been excelled by the rain of the Deluge. But of the two assailants which the town has to face the deepest impression is left by the fire. The rain may pour day after day for weeks till the country side appears like a huge wet sponge and everything drips with moisture with such monotony as to depress the mind. Let a few fine days come, with a warm sun, and the wet sponge becomes a fire brand ready to light at any moment and sweep along the country side over the tracks of the former conflagrations. A strong wind renders the outbreak perilous in the extreme and makes anxious the hearts of the people whose dwellings are in its course.<sup>53</sup>

The first significant fire after permanent settlement in the Lyell region started on 12 December 1896, adjacent to the smelter's site. With little warning, it advanced unabated upon the shanty-township of Penghana. The fire wiped out an estimated 100 tents and homes. Most commercial premises were also destroyed in the blaze, which had been fanned by gale-force winds. Only a late change in the direction of the wind saved Queenstown from a similar fate.<sup>54</sup> Penghana was unprepared for such a calamity and about 200 people were rendered homeless by one of the most disastrous Tasmanian fires for many years.<sup>55</sup> Penghana had been developed as a temporary village for

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<sup>50</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 May 1901.

<sup>51</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 September 1899.

<sup>52</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 March 1901.

<sup>53</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 25 December 1899.

<sup>54</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 December 1896.

<sup>55</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 December 1896.

construction workers employed to erect the smelters. The fire hastened the relocation of the residents and businesses to the newly-established township of Queenstown.<sup>56</sup>

Blainey contends that over five summers in the 1890s more than 400 huts and houses were destroyed about the Mount Lyell environs.<sup>57</sup> The inevitability of the bushfires made the population complacent. A careless attitude prevailed. Few preventative measures or safety precautions were taken to reduce repeat occurrences. The 23 December 1899 fire, which claimed sixteen houses on the outskirts of Queenstown, drew the *Mount Lyell Standard* to comment that no combined effort had been made to safeguard the town. The paper claimed that people were only interested in their own circumstances and not prepared to help their neighbours, to the extent that

Men sat at street corners and talked over the situation, comparing it with last year's, and women asked their husbands the reason why they had brought them to such a place. Visitors thanked God that their lot was not cast in such a town...new arrivals turned their thoughts back to Hell's Gates at Macquarie Harbor (sic), and declared that the term had been rightly bestowed.<sup>58</sup>

Apathy and a lack of preparation were common factors behind the high loss of homes in the Mount Lyell area. As in Queenstown, the inhabitants on the leases near the small mountain settlement of North Lyell took few precautionary measures to prevent bushfires spreading. On 25 January 1901 some thirty persons lost their homes in a major blaze. The *Mount Lyell Standard* was again very critical. It considered: 'this yearly loss of property has become quite an expected occurrence on Lyell with the result that few, if any, measures are taken to prevent it...people take no pains to prevent them from originating, and do not deign to notice them when alight unless they are menacing their dwellings.'<sup>59</sup>

Not all fires were bad from the Mount Lyell Company's perspective. The 25 January 1901 blaze near North Lyell destroyed a number of squatters' huts on the Company's South Tharsis lease. It saved the Company the legal expense of having them removed.<sup>60</sup> The risk of fires to isolated settlements was considerable. Upon the May 1903 takeover of the North Mount Lyell Company's assets, Sticht moved to sell the former Company's outlying houses and cottages. He advised his directors that bush fires would burn down the buildings if they were not sold prior to summer. If retained 'it would require an army of men to keep them in a safe condition, and this we cannot

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<sup>56</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 23 December 1896.

<sup>57</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 100.

<sup>58</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 25 December 1899.

<sup>59</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 28 January 1901.

<sup>60</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 31 January 1901, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/316, p. 725, AOT.

afford.’<sup>61</sup> In many instances the fires were started by misadventure, the culprits generally unknown. The frequent outbreaks frustrated Sticht. After one damaging blaze in February 1912, that emanated in the Lake Margaret area, he advised his directors that the fire had started ‘in the usual inexplicable manner.’<sup>62</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company was occasionally blamed for causing fires. The *Mount Lyell Standard* alleged the 25 February 1899 fire, which destroyed twenty huts about Queenstown, had been started by sparks from one of the Company’s narrow gauge locomotives.<sup>63</sup> Sticht strongly defended his Company. He claimed that, while a perfect spark arrester had not been invented for locomotives, it was possible the fire was started by sparks from any one of the huts in the area.<sup>64</sup> Tired of the bucket brigade mentality of fighting fires, the local paper called for the formation of a thoroughly trained and well-equipped community fire brigade to protect the town and reduce the appalling threat to life and property. The need for a coordinated and professional approach was recognised, and the Fire Brigade Board of Queenstown was formed.<sup>65</sup> Through the combination of improved fire-fighting techniques and the loss of vegetation from around the hills of Queenstown, the number and the intensity of the fires waned. Over the years the smelting works remained untouched, but the Company did incur fire damage to its various bush operations, particularly to its tramways, railways, and wooden flumes. The main line railway suffered from time to time. The greatest damage was caused by the 9 February 1934 blaze that swept the Abt section, destroying two fettler’s cottages at Rinadeena, damaging five bridges and closing the railway for seven days.<sup>66</sup>

The longstanding inconveniences suffered by the Lyell communities through the effects of rain, fires and sulphur fumes (see Chapter 2) fully tested the resolve of most inhabitants from time to time. After two decades of intense industrial activity about the Lyell area the countryside had been transformed. The once thick rainforest covering had been completely destroyed by man through the effects of clear-felling practices, fire, and the rancid sulphur fumes. Rain had then completed the process by scouring the remaining blackened debris and soil from the steep slopes. Left were the bare hills,

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<sup>61</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 11 August 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 17, AOT.

<sup>62</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 6 February 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/327, p. 693, AOT.

<sup>63</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 February 1899.

<sup>64</sup> R Sticht letter to the Company Secretary, 27 February 1899, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/315, pp. 40-41, AOT.

<sup>65</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 23 July 1901, p. 1367.

<sup>66</sup> R Murray letter to the Company Secretary, 29 October 1934, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/356, p. 530, AOT.

commonly described as having the appearance of a lunar landscape. White quartzite and pink coloured conglomerate dominated the vistas. Unfortunately for the residents of Queenstown, Linda, North Lyell and Gormanston, the evolution of the landscape created yet another enduring problem – dust storms. They were described by the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* thus:

Who is there in Queenstown who does not know what a dust storm means? High winds frequently prevail, and the grit that they bring down from the barren hillsides is alike a terror to shopkeepers, to housekeepers, and to gardeners. The dust finds its way everywhere – into the business place and the home to damage goods and furniture – and a day sometimes has to be devoted to its removal.<sup>67</sup>

To the uninitiated, the sight of Queenstown came as a shock, the burnt hills on every side presenting a ‘black, dreary waste, except where the abundant rainfall has bared the white rock beneath.’<sup>68</sup> Complete devastation was avoided due to the actions of the *Mount Lyell Standard* and the Tasmanian Tourist Association. These two bodies campaigned to protect the remaining few pockets of natural bush and native flowering plants, located outside the sphere of the sulphur fumes’ blighting influence, enabling the locals and tourists to appreciate them over the coming years.<sup>69</sup> A decade later, at its 27 May 1908 inaugural meeting, the Mount Lyell Tourist Association considered ways to increase tourist numbers. The Association anticipated that by opening up tracks, erecting tourist huts and developing beauty spots, including lakes and waterfalls, a trip to Queenstown would be enhanced. In reality, it was acknowledged that many tourists would visit the area to witness the “lunar waste” and to inspect the world-renown copper processing operations.<sup>70</sup>

The Association achieved some creditable outcomes. It was directly responsible for the development of a number of picnic grounds, including the park at the King River Gorge, and promoted the region to the Melbourne tourist market.<sup>71</sup> The Queenstown Horticultural Society added colour to the area, demonstrating that gardening was a productive activity despite the challenges posed by the extreme climatic conditions and the sulphur pollution.<sup>72</sup> A number of splendid examples of vegetables and flowers were grown locally. At the opening of the annual floricultural show in January 1911, Sticht noted the local gardening fraternity had ‘brought the growing of flowers under their

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<sup>67</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 February 1913.

<sup>68</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1903.

<sup>69</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 27 November 1897.

<sup>70</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 May 1908.

<sup>71</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 December 1913.

<sup>72</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 February 1913.



tutelage in order to encourage a love for the beautiful in nature.’<sup>73</sup> The zest for gardening continued, the locals adapting to the climate and sulphur emissions, to produce vegetables and flowers of a very high standard. In 1913 Frank Walker, a visiting horticultural expert, noted that gardening in Queenstown was far more advanced than “the outside world” could imagine. He considered that from the good results already achieved it ‘would do much in many ways to improve the conditions of life at Queenstown.’<sup>74</sup> A decade later Whitham noted that upon the disappearance of the sulphur miasma ‘Queenstown people find that they can grow anything in their gardens that does not object to imperfect aridity.’<sup>75</sup>

Perceptions varied considerably as to the beauty of the West Coast environment. As an ardent admirer of the wilderness, Whitham wrote with much passion about the wider Lyell area, its isolation and its splendor. He expressed disappointment in the local population who endured their surroundings, preferring to either partake in contrived social activities or to escape the district altogether:

Do the people of this country appreciate the wild loveliness of their scenery? They do not. Most of them curse the wet climate, the dense forests, the isolation from urban amenities and...enjoy no prospect so much as the road that leads out of the highlands...Not many people have a real love for natural beauty, apart from its human associations, and most of our western folk would rather see a racecourse, a crowded dance-room, or a billiard-saloon, than the prospect from a hill overlooking Macquarie Harbour, with its winding bays and the changing lights on its waters.<sup>76</sup>

In later years two visiting authors, writing eight years apart, were at total odds with their impressions of the Lyell landscape. Writing in 1944, Charles Barrett viewed the barren hills as being beautiful and majestic. Describing the Gormanston area, Barrett recounts that ‘we entered a weird region of bare, rugged mountains, whose sunlit colours varied from rose-flushed grey to rich browns, orange and mustard-yellow, misty purple and blue, with rifts and patches of white; salmon tints, too.’<sup>77</sup> ET Emmett’s 1952 depiction of the same area was far less complimentary:

Lyell itself is like nowhere on earth, as you will see when you approach it. Gaunt, weird mountain shapes hem the towns of Gormanston and Queenstown, and the entry through Linda Valley is a nightmare. A journalist visitor was challenged to sum it up in a terse sentence, and his pronouncement was “Hell, with the fires out.” Go and see how right he was.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 19 January 1911.

<sup>74</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 6 February 1913.

<sup>75</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches & Beauty*, p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches & Beauty*, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> C Barrett, *Isle of Mountains – Roaming through Tasmania*, Melbourne, Cassell & Company Limited, 1944, p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> ET Emmett, *Tasmania by Road and Track*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1962, p. 76.

The development of indoor and outdoor activities proved successful in diverting attention from the poor climate and oppressive surroundings. Apart from the gardening and walking pursuits discussed, the community demonstrated an increasing willingness to partake in a wide-range of leisure pursuits.

### **Early Amusements and Outdoor Activities**

The following section briefly outlines the development of organised sporting, recreational and community events in the early years about the Lyell and Macquarie Harbour areas. These activities provided a social outlet for the isolated communities, where men worked long hours and poor weather limited opportunities for family outings and outdoor pursuits. The push to develop organised outdoor recreational activities came at an early stage of the settlement about Mount Lyell. The first sports day in the area was held mid-March 1895, on cleared ground near the new smelters. Approximately 400 to 500 people attended. The events were keenly contested, although late rains had made conditions heavy going.<sup>79</sup> Several inter-town scratch football matches were played during the winter of 1895, comprising teams from the Crossing and Lyell.<sup>80</sup> Facilities were makeshift. Little time was devoted to relaxation as the schedules for the Mount Lyell Company's works program were tight. Progress Committees and Town Boards spent little time or money on sports amenities. They concentrated on developing sanitary facilities and constructing roads. Queenstown Recreation ground improvements were effected by voluntary undertaking, subsidised in 1896 by community fundraising events.<sup>81</sup>

During 1897 a number of sporting societies were formed. These included the Queenstown Tennis Club (February), the Queenstown Football Association (May), comprising the Queenstown, Smelters and the Flux Quarries clubs, and a four team cricket competition. The Mount Lyell Company supported the activities and provided 392 wagon loads of silica gravel to upgrade the recreation ground. Football became the major player and spectator sport in the Lyell area. Strong links were forged with the Victorian Football League at an early stage. In the first inter-colonial match held in Queenstown during June 1900, a strong Fitzroy side defeated the Lyell Districts by sixteen points. The Victorians were most surprised by the playing conditions,

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<sup>79</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 March 1895.

<sup>80</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 August 1895 – The Crossing comprising inhabitants from the Queen River Valley and Lyell including miners from the Gormanston area.

<sup>81</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 September 1896.

particularly the gravel surface and the wafting sulphur fumes from the nearby smelters.<sup>82</sup>

The West Coast Acclimatisation Committee provided a valuable outlet for outdoor activities and provided evidence of a wish to recreate respectable middle-class leisure pursuits on the mining fields. Formed in Zeehan in September 1899, the Committee introduced wildfowl and trout to cater for the shooting and fishing fraternity. It achieved quick results, the first trout being released into the Lake Dora district later that same month.<sup>83</sup> Wood chopping, hammer and drill contests and athletics proved popular. The regular AMA athletic carnivals held in Queenstown and Linda were always well attended. Other regular outdoor pursuits included regattas and horse racing events at Strahan and the Mount Lyell Company's annual picnics. Sport and recreation activities quickly developed, becoming a valuable social outlet for the emerging mining communities. Sticht was not a keen sportsman, but he did recognise the need to foster healthy habits. He considered such assistance may placate those still harbouring a grudge against the Company that had followed its May 1903 takeover of the North Mount Lyell enterprise. In February 1905 he was approached to provide land for the Gormanston recreation ground. He treated the matter in a 'liberal spirit, for the sake of the oppositional tone which prevails at Gormanston.'<sup>84</sup>

As an American, Sticht had little empathy for Australian Rules football. His anti-football stance was evident upon the death of a miner who, perchance, played the game. Blaming football for increasing inefficiencies at work, he advised the Company Secretary that the men 'have not really their minds on their work, and probably devote too much of their attention to sport. The influence of the latter is easily noticeable amongst the younger crew.'<sup>85</sup> By contrast, Sticht considered family picnics to be a very necessary ingredient in the mix of life for West Coast residents. The first official Company sponsored "outing" was held at Piccaninni Point on 5 December 1897. It attracted over 600 people from Queenstown and 140 from Strahan and Zeehan. The annual picnics became an institution in the Lyell communities. The outings removed the men from their working toils, 'right away from the sickly, binding fumes of the smelters...families spent a day that, to most of them, was enjoyable beyond

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<sup>82</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 June 1900.

<sup>83</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 September 1899. Russell Murray attempted to introduce trout into areas around Mount Lyell for many years, a hatchery was eventually established at Lake Margaret in 1927 – Chapter 7 refers.

<sup>84</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 24 February 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/320, pp. 640-641, AOT.

<sup>85</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 28 May 1909, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/324, p. 994, AOT.



QUEENSTOWN BAND, INTERCOLONIAL CHAMPIONS - 1897



THE STRAHAN BRASS BAND – c. 1899

expression.’<sup>86</sup> The Company also fostered picnic areas along its railway, at People’s Park near the King River Gorge (1901), Dubbil Barril (1910) and Lettes Bay (1922). Sticht observed that workers on the mainland could ‘religiously take their ordinary holidays, week-ends, and so on, while all those recreative periods are excluded here, so that the annual picnic, which is about all the recreation that most of the men here take, is a very important outing for them.’<sup>87</sup>

Brass bands accompanied social outings. No picnic, parade or ceremony was complete without a band. The Queenstown Brass Band, formed in January 1897, was the first in the Lyell area. It rose to national prominence in November when it travelled to Sydney and won the title of Champion Band of Australia.<sup>88</sup> Within two years new bands were formed at Gormanston (Lyell Brass Band) and Strahan. They played prominent roles in town parades and patriotic marches, which became a popular phenomenon. Mining towns were famous for public ceremonies. Solomon, in his study on Broken Hill, explains that ‘Broken Hillites had always been good at making a crowd...whether the lack of alternatives arising from isolation, the presence of an unusual community spirit, or a positively Oxonian affinity for lost causes is a sufficient explanation is not known. But the Hillites did turn up often, and in force.’<sup>89</sup> Blainey contends that ‘isolation bred camaraderie and rough loyalty. In sickness or death or celebration it was a community. Entertainments were simple, but the whole town was welcome.’<sup>90</sup>

The events of the Boer War aroused patriotic fervour in the Lyell communities and provided opportunities for street marches. The ‘Relief of Ladysmith’ was celebrated in Queenstown. The marchers, led by the Queenstown Brass Band playing “Soldiers of the Queen,” attracted some 4,000 people of all ages and sexes. The event proved a sight ‘never yet been witnessed on the West Coast.’<sup>91</sup> The ‘Relief of Mafeking’ drew even greater participation. Four parades were held on Friday 18 May 1900, commencing with a street demonstration in the morning and followed by a mid-afternoon parade of flag-waving school children. The late afternoon procession featured 600 to 700 marchers who had started at the Mount Lyell Company’s works and proceeded into town. The evening’s parade proved yet larger again. The contingent

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<sup>86</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 December 1898.

<sup>87</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 3 December 1909, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, p. 385, AOT.

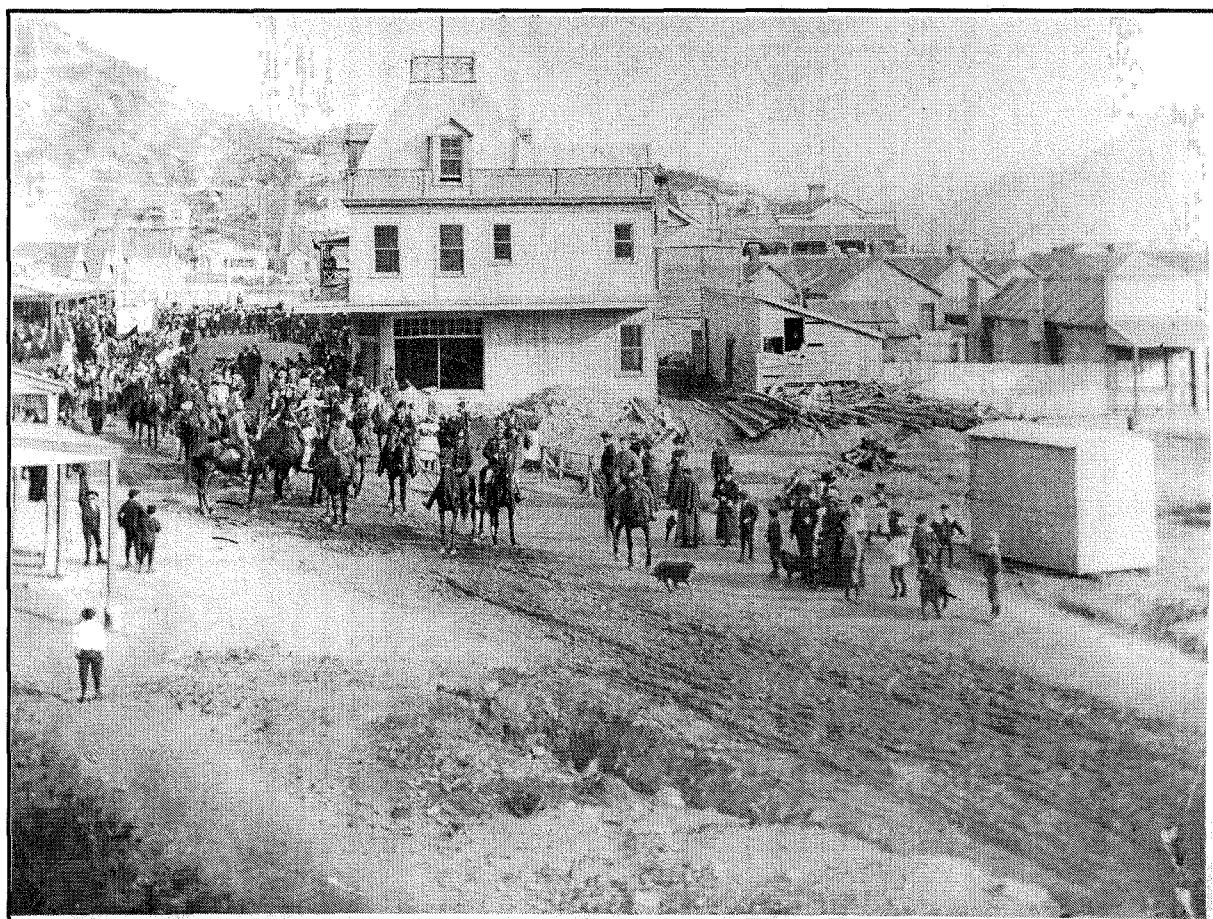
<sup>88</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 November 1897.

<sup>89</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988, p. 135.

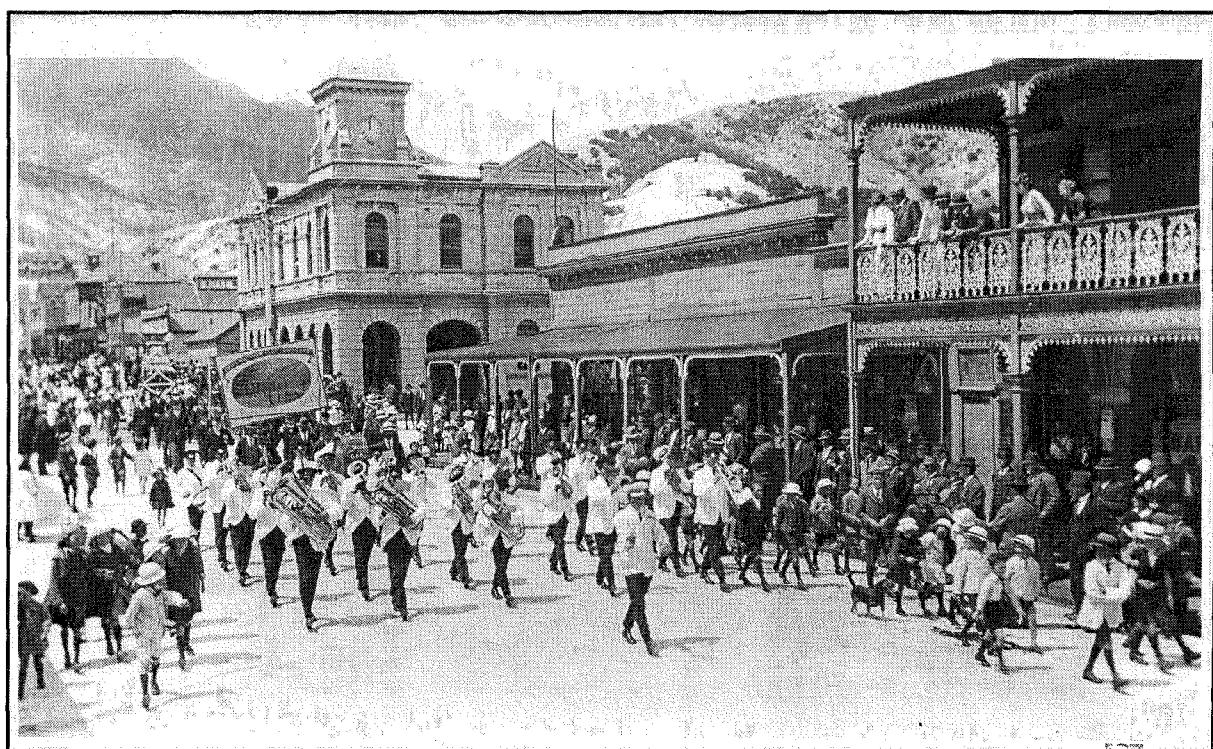
<sup>90</sup> G Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex – The Story of Mount Isa Mines*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1962, p. 152.

<sup>91</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 March 1900.





QUEENSTOWN PARADE, RELIEF OF MAFEKING – 18 MAY 1900



PARADE MAIN STREET OF QUEENSTOWN – c. 1935

marched through the streets of Queenstown to the patriotic tunes of the Queenstown Band, cheered on by a crowd nearly 5,000 strong.<sup>92</sup> The inauguration of the Commonwealth was celebrated in Queenstown. The Queenstown and Strahan bands led the 1 January 1901 evening procession through the town, marking 'the most important event which had ever occurred in the British-owned portion of the Southern Hemisphere.'<sup>93</sup>

Queenstown men enjoyed a wide variety of activities. Lodges and Friendly Societies proved very popular. The Independent Order of Oddfellows was formed in Queenstown in March 1897, followed by a second chapter in Gormanston in March 1898. By August 1900 the Masonic Lodge was represented at Strahan and Queenstown, the Druids at Strahan and Queenstown, the Oddfellows at Strahan, Gormanston and Queenstown and the Hibernians at Strahan.<sup>94</sup> Further installations occurred at Kelly Basin in 1901 and Crotty in 1902. Apart from providing a social outlet, the fraternities offered health insurance and a range of medical benefits to members. Sticht acknowledged the social work performed by the brethren in looking after their own. Such activities reduced the Company's liabilities for injuries and sickness of employee members.<sup>95</sup> The rapid spread of the Lodges was common on the local and interstate mining fields. In 1908 thirty-two lodges or branches operated in Broken Hill.<sup>96</sup>

Gentlemen's clubs also attracted large memberships, the Mopoke Club proving a popular retreat during 1896 for Company staff living at the Crossing. The Club offered 'a reading room where a large number of newspapers can be seen, and where a man can go and write a letter if he so wishes, play a game of cards, chess, etc....the remainder of the evening is spent in a convivial manner, songs, recitations, and occasionally a debate.'<sup>97</sup> The Queenstown Club catered for a more exclusive clientele. Formed in 1902, its membership comprised staff of the Mount Lyell Company and the principal professionals and businessmen of the town.<sup>98</sup> Formal dances, poetry recitals, music and singing were popular past times for the general population. The Queenstown Glee Club provided an early outlet for these activities. With few opportunities to travel, the local

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<sup>92</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 19 May 1900.

<sup>93</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 January 1901.

<sup>94</sup> *Strahan Banner*, 22 August 1900.

<sup>95</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 May 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/328, p. 1, AOT.

<sup>96</sup> Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, p. 278.

<sup>97</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 February 1896.

<sup>98</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 February 1902.

population became avid supporters of live theatrical performances. Queenstown quickly gained a reputation as one of the best show towns in the colony.<sup>99</sup>

The early development of sporting and cultural activities provided the mining communities with opportunities to enjoy their fleeting leisure hours, providing a welcome relief from the workplace and the generally oppressive environment. The development of good health facilities was of importance to workers and their families, this facet is covered in the next section.

### **Health Services and the Trade Unions**

This section briefly outlines the history of the major medical accident and insurance societies established on the Lyell field. It documents the rise to dominance of the Mount Lyell Company's supported health providers, the Queenstown Hospital and the Mount Lyell Mine Medical Unions, and their role in subduing much of the early influence exerted by the AMA on the field.

From the outset, the Mount Lyell Company considered that an effective health scheme and well-equipped medical centre were essential for community wellbeing. A steering committee was convened at the Crossing on 2 May 1895 to form a District Accident Society. The Chairman of the meeting, DK Rhodes, outlined the need 'for the formation of a fund or society of some kind for the immediate assistance surgically, etc, of the many residents of the district, any of whom might at any moment need the attention and care of a medical man.'<sup>100</sup> It was envisaged the society would provide both medical attendance and medicine for Company workers and their families, in return for a weekly levy on wages. Within a few weeks the Mount Lyell District Medical League was formed. Robert Sticht was the League's inaugural president and the Mount Lyell Company its patrons. The community response was immediate, with 250 members joining. Deductions from wages commenced the first pay after 16 May meeting.<sup>101</sup> On 4 July 1895 Dr TE Abbott was employed as the medical officer for a period of twelve months. He was required to reside in the principal centre of population within the Mount Lyell District, which comprised Penghana, Pokana (Queenstown), Gormanston and Lynchford.<sup>102</sup>

The League's operations proved successful except in times of typhoid outbreaks and general epidemics, when members suffered because the small Queenstown cottage

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<sup>99</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 August 1899.

<sup>100</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

<sup>101</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

<sup>102</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 September 1906.



hospital was unable to cope with excessive workloads. The League sought to rectify the situation by levying members an extra 3*d.* per week to fund a new hospital. This practice had been employed in Zeehan and in other isolated Tasmanian communities to build and maintain local hospitals.<sup>103</sup> The demand for a wider range of medical benefits and insurance led to the formation of a number of Friendly Societies in Queenstown during 1897. The Medical League was duly dissolved and replaced on 1 July 1897 by the Queenstown Hospital Union. Subscriptions assisted the hospital's upkeep and the payment of medical staff. Sticht supported the new health schemes as they contributed to the improvement in general health services and worker contentment. Although not exerting the same authority over the new Hospital Union, the Company still retained some control through the collection of the subscriber fees from its employees and by ensuring suitable staff were appointed to senior positions on the Hospital Union's managing committee. The Company donated £100 annually towards hospital upkeep, this custom having been established by the Mount Bischoff Company in maintaining the Waratah hospital.<sup>104</sup>

Acceptance of the Queenstown Hospital Union was widespread. By May 1898 some 1,700 employees and townspeople were on the Hospital Union's books. A second major health body in the Lyell region was formed in 1897. The Mount Lyell Medical Union sought to provide an improved service for the miners and their families who could not readily access the Queenstown facilities. It catered for the Company's employees at the Iron Blow and a number of miners from nearby smaller shows. The Medical Union received the tacit support of the Mount Lyell Company and was administered by a committee comprising mine managers and employees. The subscriptions were used to fund a doctor to permanently reside in Gormanston and for the construction a local casualty ward.<sup>105</sup>

With the escalation of mining operations at the North Mount Lyell mine during the first half of 1900, the Mount Lyell Medical Union was reorganised to reflect the two dominant mining companies on the field. The Mount Lyell Mine Medical Union represented the Iron Blow miners and the North Mount Lyell Mines Medical Union served the North Lyell underground employees and other allied miners on the mountain. The Mount Lyell Mine Medical Union employed Dr GA Walpole as its medical

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<sup>103</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 April 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/311, p. 691, AOT.

<sup>104</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 15 July 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, pp. 63-64, AOT.

<sup>105</sup> R Sticht letter to LC Clark, 12 February 1900, Letterbook from the General Manager to the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/49, pp. 196-197, AOT.

practitioner and organised the construction of the badly needed casualty ward at Gormanston. This building was completed in April 1901, helped by a £100 donation made by the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>106</sup>

The North Mount Lyell Mines Medical Union employed Dr Hodgkinson who resided in the North Lyell township. Following the May 1903 takeover of the North Mount Lyell operations, the Mount Lyell Mine Medical Union assumed the role of the major service provider for the mining community. For their one shilling weekly subscription, each member received medical attendance, hospital accommodation and accident pay. By early 1911 its membership numbered 750 subscribers. As union unrest beset the Mount Lyell mining operations through 1911, culminating in the 23 September 1911 miners' strike that lasted fifty-six days, the number of miners employed fell from 769 in March 1911 to 246 at the end of the year.<sup>107</sup> The financial viability of the Union was ruined and in February 1912 it was liquidated. Many men transferred their memberships to the Queenstown Hospital Union, now the dominant health provider in the Lyell region. The North Mount Lyell Mines Medical Union had long disappeared, the Mount Lyell Company having swallowed up opposition mines one by one. By 1905 membership comprised a number of men from the Mount Lyell Blocks, Crown Lyell and several smaller mines about the area.<sup>108</sup>

Unlike the formation of the medical unions, the development of hospital facilities in Queenstown was a drawn out affair. The first hospital comprised a marquee tent at the Crossing, which was hastily removed during the Penghana fire. A replacement cottage hospital was then erected in Cutten Street, Queenstown, in 1897. Accommodation comprised two wards, a kitchen and bathroom. Two marquees were later added for typhoid patients and a third for surgical cases.<sup>109</sup> The need for a larger and more modern hospital was apparent. The government agreed to the works in 1897, passing of a vote of £1,000 conditional on a sum of £500 being raised locally.<sup>110</sup> Although the £500 was quickly subscribed and paid to Treasury on 15 July 1898, the new hospital was not forthcoming. In July 1899, during his brief stint as Minister for Lands and Works, Edward Miles suggested that a regional hospital be erected in his hometown of Strahan, safely away from the sulphur and lead fumes of Queenstown and

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<sup>106</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 3 April 1901, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/316, pp. 863-864, AOT.

<sup>107</sup> The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarters ending 31 March 1911, p. 9 and 31 December 1911, p. 11, Mines Department.

<sup>108</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 2 June 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/320, p. 932, AOT.

<sup>109</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

<sup>110</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 December 1897.

Zeehan. Miles was reminded that Queenstown was the central town for the mining district and building a hospital anywhere but in Queenstown was inappropriate.<sup>111</sup>

Pressure came to bear in September 1899 after patients and staff contracted typhoid within the cramped confines of the hospital.<sup>112</sup> Compounding the crisis was the fact that Queenstown recorded significantly high numbers of typhoid cases in 1897 (57), 1898 (52) and in 1899, when the figure reached 70, the highest number reported in Tasmania that year.<sup>113</sup> With the typhoid numbers expected to increase through the summer, government agreed in September 1899 to call tenders. The first stage of the Lyell District Hospital, located on the hill above McNamara Street, opened in January.<sup>114</sup> Further funding of £1,800 was set-aside by government the same year for a new wing.<sup>115</sup>

Upon completion, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* reported that the hospital was capable of performing all that was required of it and its equipment was equal to any other hospital in the State.<sup>116</sup> Importantly, through the efforts of judicious management by the Hospital Board and the support of the Hospital Union's subscribing members, the hospital operated at a profit. The paper highlighted the result as striking examples of self-help and self-reliant attitudes exhibited by Queenstown's population. The highly meritorious outcome was seen as a lesson to those who adopted a spoon-fed mentality for hospital services elsewhere in the larger towns and cities.<sup>117</sup>

The superior service offered by the new hospital was instrumental in the Mount Lyell Company's fight to control support for the AMA, the major union on the western mining fields. The AMA rose to prominence in the Lyell area following the 14 September 1896 formation of a local sub-branch in Gormanston. The Union's edict was to maintain miners' wages and to provide benefits to fellow unionists, whether local or in the colonies, in need of assistance.<sup>118</sup> At the time it was considered to be a moderate union led by mainly reasonable men who did not tolerate shirkers. The AMA espoused a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay.'<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the Mount Lyell management distrusted the AMA as it opposed the Company's existing practice of contract mining. Bowes Kelly and his fellow directors provided Sticht with an understanding of the

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<sup>111</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 July 1899.

<sup>112</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 September 1899.

<sup>113</sup> JPPP, Central Board of Health: Report for the Year 1899, 1900, paper 72, pp. 4-5, & 9.

<sup>114</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

<sup>115</sup> JPPP, Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1901, 1901, paper 42, p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 January 1903.

<sup>117</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 January 1905.

<sup>118</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 September 1896.

<sup>119</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 199.

AMA's activities, as a branch of the Union had been formed in 1886 at Broken Hill. The Union had subsequently crossed the path of the Broken Hill Company over the ensuing years.<sup>120</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company readily acknowledged the value of the AMA in providing sickness benefits to its members. However, by facilitating the collection of workers' subscriptions and exerting control through staff appointments to the management committees of the two existing medical unions, the Company dominated activities "from afar." Apart from organising the paperwork, the Company facilitated the success of the medical unions through its financial support of the Queenstown hospital and the casualty ward in Gormanston. The AMA medical scheme could not deliver comparable hospital services. Consequently, it was unable to exert any great influence over the Company's operations at the Iron Blow. The Company did not favour directly operating its own medical benefits scheme as the concept had been tried at Broken Hill and had failed.<sup>121</sup>

The extent of the role Company-supported medical unions played in checking the AMA became more evident following the May 1903 takeover of North Mount Lyell operations. It had been widely recognised by the mining industry that the North Mount Lyell miners did less work for more pay than any other miner in the land.<sup>122</sup> The North Lyell mine became a hotspot for AMA loyalists and occasionally 'the men in the Stopes ceased work and started speechifying on A.M.A. affairs and political business.'<sup>123</sup> Sticht was aware that he would face industrial action as soon as he introduced parity in wage rates. However, he was conscious that he held the whip hand in the proceedings as the issue of medical insurance and associated hospital benefits was important to the miners and their families. The medical unions offered superior terms and services compared to the benefits conferred by the AMA. To compete the Union would need to charge members a second levy. This action would cause the men to drift away from their Union.<sup>124</sup>

With little bargaining power, the AMA capitulated to the demands of the Mount Lyell Company. Sticht and his managers effected a policy of uniform wages and soon

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<sup>120</sup> B Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale – A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1978, pp. 29-32.

<sup>121</sup> R Sticht letter to LC Clark, 6 September 1899, Letterbook from the General Manager to the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/49, pp. 164-165, AOT.

<sup>122</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 202.

<sup>123</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 17 July 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/318, p. 927, AOT.

<sup>124</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 10 July 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/318, pp. 886-887, AOT.

dismissed the main troublemakers in the mines. Industrial peace and an increase in productivity were quickly achieved. Sticht, the ever-shrewd tactician, emerged triumphant. His earlier predictions concerning the decline in AMA membership had proved accurate. The Union's January 1904 membership had fallen to 200, well below the 707 recorded two months earlier. The AMA readily conceded that Sticht had won the day. Gormanston Branch President, JJ Mahoney advised members that every man 'who had dropped out of the A.M.A. had done exactly as the Mount Lyell Company wished.'<sup>125</sup> Contrary to Townsley's belief that the demands of unionists on the West Coast were built on wages and the right to strike, and not issues of a socialistic nature,<sup>126</sup> it was most apparent that medical issues were important to the men and their families. The victory was sweet for Sticht. While he did not detest the AMA as an entity, he was critical of its Gormanston organisers who he considered to be of 'seditious and treacherous character...there is scarcely anyone who has charge of affairs there, who has not quite a police record behind him.'<sup>127</sup>

While the Company's preference to manipulate the health schemes from afar proved successful, the same "hands off" policy did not work when it came to dealing with the personal welfare issues that confronted its workforce.

### **Company Welfare – A First for Tasmania**

From the onset of mining on the West Coast the local managers faced major problems in attracting skilled labour to the wet and isolated environment. Many new arrivals did not stay long, being deterred by the poor climate and the lack of amenities. For two decades the Mount Lyell Company did little to address the general living conditions of its employees and their families. This section examines the reasons behind the Company's change in policy and the implementation of what was to become a very comprehensive welfare scheme, providing it with a subtle form of domination over its workforce, the first of its type in Tasmania. Historians have overlooked the Company's pioneering role in welfare capitalism in Tasmania. It is the Electrolytic Zinc Company and Cadbury Fry Pascal that are commonly toted by historians as the Tasmanian firms 'that were unusual amongst Australian firms in that they structured

<sup>125</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 January 1904.

<sup>126</sup> WA Townsley, *Tasmania – From Colony to Statehood, 1803-1945*, Hobart, St David's Park Publishing, 1991, p. 150.

<sup>127</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 April 1904, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, pp. 707-708, AOT.

their industrial relations policy around extensive welfare schemes at a time when this was the exception rather than the rule.’<sup>128</sup>

During the early construction phase at Mount Lyell Company directors used their wealth of experience gained from the successful Broken Hill mining and processing operations to ensure plans were expedited. Senior positions were filled with highly-qualified staff who were well paid to establish the operations. On Sticht’s arrival at Mount Lyell he was confronted by what he perceived to be a neglected mining industry and atrocious conditions. Leave provisions were improved to enable the men to escape the district for extended periods. However, the Company did little to acclimatise its workforce and families to the isolated environment. Only a lucky few were provided with basic accommodation, while the remainder were left to fend for themselves. This lack of consideration fostered a transient population. Sticht observed that without official direction, the early settlements of Penghana and Queenstown had developed in an ad hoc fashion. He considered that firm direction and strong leadership were required otherwise the growth of Queenstown would suffer, men would continue to settle in the bush and avoid contributing to the general welfare and improvement of the district.<sup>129</sup>

Upon his arrival, Sticht avoided involvement with social issues concerning individual employees as such schemes had been tried at Broken Hill with limited success.<sup>130</sup> Apart from providing some staff houses, the Company had not intended to own or control houses in the township for its men.<sup>131</sup> However, in an attempt to prevent workers squatting on Crown land outside the town boundaries, Sticht recommended to the Board that the Company supply timber from its sawmill to assist its “better class of men” establish themselves within the newly-surveyed town of Queenstown.<sup>132</sup> This June 1896 initiative marked the beginning of the Company’s welfare assistance program, albeit to a small degree. The early growth of the Company’s permanent workforce mirrored activities at the smelters. By 25 June 1896, when smelting trials commenced, 156 men were employed. This number increased to 731 by the end of the

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<sup>128</sup> R Barton, ‘Cooperation and Labour Management at Electrolytic Zinc and Cadbury-Fry-Pascall between 1918 and 1939,’ unpublished MA Thesis, History Department, University of Tasmania, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 June 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, pp. 517-519, AOT.

<sup>130</sup> R Sticht letter to LC Clark, 20 September 1899, Letterbook from the General Manager to the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/49, pp. 155-156, AOT.

<sup>131</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 June 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 518, AOT.

<sup>132</sup> R Sticht letter to AR Pontifex, 16 June 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 545, AOT.

year, before the commissioning of the converter plant.<sup>133</sup> By December 1900 the workforce numbered 2,154, of which 570 worked in the mines, 1,325 at the reduction works and 259 on the railway.<sup>134</sup> Dealing with the growing labour force created problems. Many men were either unskilled or had been unemployed prior to arriving from the mainland. Of concern was an element of Hobart criminals and riff-raff that had arrived looking for work on the West Coast.<sup>135</sup>

The ability to attract a better class of worker to Queenstown was not helped by many derogatory comments circulating about Hobart regarding the 'social life, habits, and instincts of the inhabitants of the West Coast.'<sup>136</sup> Commenting on the population living in Queenstown in 1901, parliamentarian Herbert Nicholls observed:

The population of the West changes rapidly. Most of the people have just arrived or are about to depart. The greater number of the men are Victorians, and of the Remainder nine-tenths at Queenstown are Hobartians. The climate of the Coast prevents it ever being a place where people will reside from choice, and will always tend to keep the population on the move, for if the men do not leave it of their own accord, their wives will in the end take them away. It is at present no place for women.<sup>137</sup>

With the AMA effectively sidelined, the period 1904 to 1911 was a time of consolidation for the Mount Lyell Company and its mining communities. Production levels of ore mined during this era were remarkably consistent, the six monthly reports showing a maximum of 216,039 tons for the period ending 31 March 1906 and a minimum of 184,116 tons for the six months ending 31 March 1911. Copper outputs over this same period were steady, with the six monthly outputs generally between 4,000 and 4,500 tons.<sup>138</sup> The Company's workforce remained stable, with a high of 2,226 in June 1906 and a low of 1,807 in December 1911.<sup>139</sup> While on paper the results appeared solid, the Company believed profits could have improved but for the problem of maintaining a permanent labour force. Towards the end of 1909 Sticht advised management that it was now time to review its housing policy. He was concerned that his senior staff and their families were being forced to leave the region through the lack of schooling and the pronounced unwillingness of the wives to remain in substandard housing in the wet climate. Sticht sought approval to build additions onto some of the

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<sup>133</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 February 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/311, p. 525, AOT.

<sup>134</sup> The Progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarter ending 31 December 1900, 1901, Mines Department, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 November 1896.

<sup>136</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 14 March 1900.

<sup>137</sup> *The Banner*, 12 September 1900.

<sup>138</sup> Figures obtained from the corresponding MLMRC Half-yearly reports, Queenstown.

<sup>139</sup> The progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarters ending 30 June 1906, and 31 December 1910, Mines Department, p. 11 and p. 9 respectively.

staff houses so the women could enjoy 'the small additional comfort of a little more breathing space at home.'<sup>140</sup>

Coming into 1911, labour numbers for the June quarter fell to 1,685,<sup>141</sup> forcing the Company to reduce its development work. Of further concern was criticism in the local paper concerning the high prices of bread, meat and other essentials in Queenstown, further adding to the perception that Lyell was an unenviable place to live and work. Union unrest followed. This time the Company faced a far stronger foe, the AMA having been absorbed by the stronger Amalgamated Mining Employees' Association of Victoria (AMEA). A minor strike (3 May 1911) followed by a major strike (23 September - 18 November 1911) exposed the growing discontent. The workforce numbers fell even further, to 1,382 in March 1912,<sup>142</sup> causing the Company to review its smelting operations. In a reversal of its original strategy, the Company embarked on a program to induce miners back to the region. A free workers' train service was implemented on 28 May 1912, the cost and practicalities initially causing concern to Sticht who admitted 'something must be done, and I trust this new departure will be successful in securing further hands for the mines.'<sup>143</sup>

The Company's efforts to attract experienced miners from New Zealand, Adelaide, Bendigo, Ballarat and Tasmania (Beaconsfield) met with limited success. In a desperate gamble, the Company turned to employing inexperienced Maltese.<sup>144</sup> Their first experience on the western mining fields was in May 1912, with thirty men commencing work at the Tasmanian Smelting Company's works at Zeehan.<sup>145</sup> Travelling under British passports, but speaking little English, the majority had just arrived in Australia. A dubious Sticht accepted the first contingent of fifteen men on 20 June 1912. He tested their resolve by sending them to Lake Margaret 'to live and work under the fiercest conditions obtaining on the West Coast, as well as the most primitive.'<sup>146</sup> Within a week Sticht received encouraging reports. He implored Head Office to send another fifty, advising 'these men continue to work excellently...in view

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<sup>140</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 October 1909, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pages unnumbered, AOT.

<sup>141</sup> The progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarter ending 30 June 1911, Mines Department, p. 9.

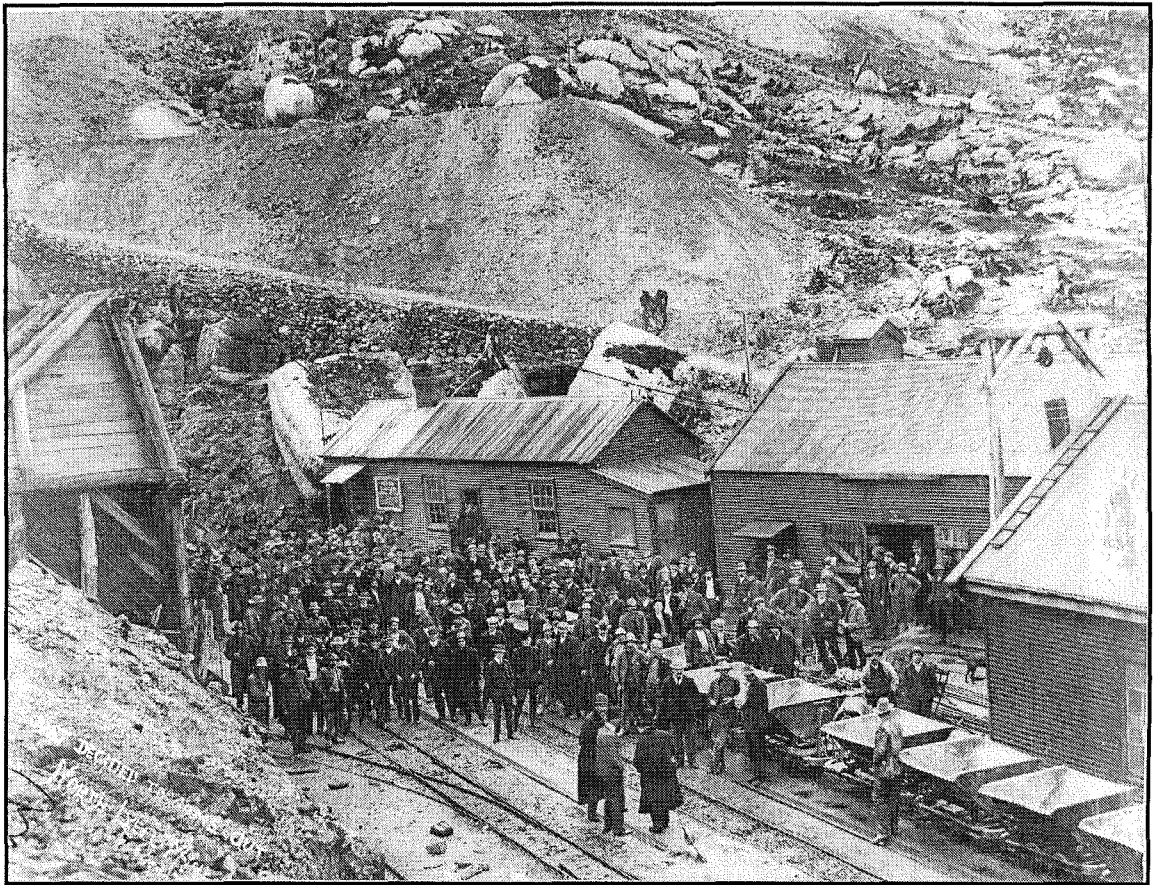
<sup>142</sup> The progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarter ending 31 March 1912, Mines Department, p. 9.

<sup>143</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 17 May 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/327, p. 993, AOT.

<sup>144</sup> The first organised Maltese immigration program into Australia had occurred in 1882, but it was not until May 1912 that groups of Maltese began to arrive in Australia with some frequency.

<sup>145</sup> B York, *Empire and Race – The Maltese in Australia 1881-1949*, Sydney, New South Wales University Press, 1990, pp. 50-51.





**STRIKE AT NORTH MOUNT LYELL MINE 1911**



**FUNERAL TRAIN QUEENSTOWN, 1912 NORTH MOUNT LYELL DISASTER**

of their fitness for outdoor work, such as tram-building.’<sup>147</sup> Sticht was not a person to readily offer praise, but he described their work as unprecedented.<sup>148</sup>

The use of the Maltese continued to prove successful and because of their easier assimilation into the workforce, the Company employed them in preference to Italians and Greeks.<sup>149</sup> With labour shortages continuing through the war years, the Mount Lyell Company frequently requested the Board to secure additional Maltese. The influx of the Maltese to the Mount Lyell mines angered unionists. The Secretary of the Lyell Branch of the Federated Mine Employees’ Association, Mr Skillern, could not understand why ‘Australians should be sent to the battle fields of Flanders while at the same time hundreds of Maltese are coming to Australia to fill their positions.’<sup>150</sup> Many Maltese soon left for the warmer climates of New South Wales.<sup>151</sup> Of the 1,325 Maltese in Australia in 1921, there were 40 in Tasmania, 623 in New South Wales, 298 in Queensland, 159 in Victoria, 147 in South Australia, 56 in Western Australia and 2 in the Northern Territory.<sup>152</sup>

Sticht’s optimism arising from the success of the Maltese was short-lived. Worker unrest in the North Lyell underground mine continued to plague the Company. The events that followed the tragic 12 October 1912 fire at the mine, as outlined in Chapter 2, were a watershed in employee and employer relationships. Seeking an immediate change in management styles, and unbeknown to Sticht, the Directors appointed Basil Sawyer,<sup>153</sup> the former Acting Chief Inspector of Mines in New South Wales, to the position of Local Superintendent. Although still the manager in name, Sticht’s power had been temporarily usurped by Sawyer, whose role was to ‘supervise, manage and conduct the operations of the Company in Tasmania.’<sup>154</sup> Hoping to obtain a better understanding of the workplace conditions at Mount Lyell, the Board requested Sticht to seek the opinions of senior staff on a broad range of issues. A specific response was sought on ‘whether the Company should not have a more definite policy

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<sup>146</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 June 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/328, p. 102, AOT.

<sup>147</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 25 June 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/328, p. 124, AOT.

<sup>148</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 September 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/328, p. 423, AOT.

<sup>149</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 9 May 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, p. 109, AOT.

<sup>150</sup> *Age*, 30 September 1916.

<sup>151</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 July 1915.

<sup>152</sup> York, *Empire and Race – The Maltese in Australia 1881-1949*, p. 220.

<sup>153</sup> Sawyer was a member of the Commission who had visited the mine, for further reading refer to Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 229. Refer also to Chapter 2, Conclusions, for further information.

<sup>154</sup> R Sticht letter to R Murray, 13 December 1912, Staff Letters, NS 1711/553, pp. 118-119, AOT.

in the matter of taking an active interest in the general welfare of the men, and, indeed, of the district.'<sup>155</sup>

Sticht's response to the Board was forthright. He advised that local expectations had changed. People now demanded higher living standards, whereas the Company's early workers had been mostly bushmen with strong physiques and stamina, men who had been used to rough living. The new breed of workers was not as hardy. They liked to spend more money on non-essentials. Sticht considered it was imperative that the Company should assist in reducing living costs, but advised it was not necessary to compete with the local bakeries and grocery shops as tried by the Great Cobar Company in central New South Wales. Sticht acknowledged the Company had previously refrained from acting as a general provider but he contended this policy should now change. It was important to provide the men with social outlets to keep them from loitering in the streets and well away from the hotels. While the Company could do nothing about the climate, it could improve living conditions. Sticht firmly believed it was not so important 'to improve the mental attainments of the population here as to give them some assistance towards passing the time more genially.'<sup>156</sup>

Engineer-in-Charge, Russell Murray, responded to Sticht by identifying the issues of poor climate, uncongenial surroundings and the absence of any form of amusement for the men to occupy their leisure time. He considered that improved boarding houses, the establishment of reading rooms, recreation halls, more bands, enhanced sports grounds and a reduction in the cost of firewood would greatly improve living conditions.<sup>157</sup> George Wright, the Company's Chief Mechanical Engineer, cited examples of where overseas manufacturers, including Cadbury's, Lever Brothers and Krupps, attained very good results in the area of employee welfare. However, he considered that because of the vagaries of the local mining industry, the Company could not be expected to match the efforts of long term manufacturing concerns. Rather than enter into housing schemes, Wright proposed improvements in the social side of the worker's lives.<sup>158</sup> Carus Driffield, Superintending Engineer, reiterated the need for improved boarding houses and for indoor and outdoor activities. He warned that the

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<sup>155</sup> DG Lumsden letter to R Sticht, 11 February 1913, Correspondence, NS 726/5, pages unnumbered, AOT.

<sup>156</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 March 1913, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, p. 666, AOT.

<sup>157</sup> R Murray letter to R Sticht, 3 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, pp. 1-11, AOT.

<sup>158</sup> GW Wright letter to R Sticht, 27 March 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, pp. 1-5, AOT.

competition from the warm hotels and billiard saloons, on inclement nights, would make it difficult to draw men from these establishments.<sup>159</sup>

Charles Whitham, who later described himself as 'a round peg in a square hole',<sup>160</sup> proffered his thoughts to Sticht. He acknowledged the welfare experiments initiated elsewhere by Lever Brothers (Cheshire), Cadbury's (Warwickshire) and the National Cash Register Company (Ohio) but considered the operations of the Mount Lyell Company so varied and involving so many classes of occupations, that no one set theory would fit them all. He warned that paternalism had both dangers and advantages and was a complex problem that required patient and tactful treatment. Whitham believed the workers wanted the guarantee of a permanent job and assurance that their old age would be provided for. He considered that the mine disaster had united the community and it was unanimously accepted that the Company had spared neither expense nor trouble to rescue the entombed miners and guard against any possible repetition of trouble.<sup>161</sup>

Whitham was keen to promote the well being of the population, to preserve the natural scenery and to foster local interest in Queenstown. He considered that many people regarded the district as a place of temporary sojourn and not as a permanent residence. The destruction of the countryside gave the town a cheerless and desolate aspect. Local associations, the clergy included, had shown little empathy in aspects of social welfare. Whitham suggested the role played overseas by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was relevant, but Queenstown may not be such a congenial place to establish the enterprise. He saw great merit in improving housing, council services, the library, school facilities and recreational hobbies. Most significantly, Whitham recognised the important influence exercised by women on family matters and the many discomforts and drawbacks of their existing environment. He noted that even contented men had been induced to leave the field because of the lack of attention paid to the needs of the women and their families. Playgrounds, family amenities and vacations to the seaside should be provided. For the women and children in Gormanston, the facilities and opportunities were considerably worse. Whitham lamented: 'It is a pathetic sight to see the youngsters at Kelly Basin on the one day of

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<sup>159</sup> EC Drifffield letter to R Sticht, 2 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, pp. 1-9, AOT.

<sup>160</sup> L Whitham, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People and other historical research*, Sandy Bay, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 2002, p. 236.

<sup>161</sup> C Whitham letter to R Sticht, 11 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, pp. 1-15, AOT.

the year they are able to visit that Elysian spot at slight expense, gathering the common dandelions and cherishing them as though they were rare and delicate blooms.<sup>162</sup>

Learning from mainland and overseas examples, the Mount Lyell Company extended its welfare works. The Gormanston and Linda recreation grounds were improved, firewood and coal charges reduced to employees, a boarding house was purchased at Crotty for use by Company timber cutters and works were commenced repairing the Company owned houses. Workers bought houses from the Company at prices well under market value, enabling them to bring their families to the district and settle down.<sup>163</sup> The same year (1913) union shift-bosses were appointed onto the staff, concessional railway tickets were granted to employees and their families, freight was carried free of charge for employees living in the outlying towns and the Company increased its donations to various local institutions. In 1914 the Company further expanded its house purchase, renovation and construction program in the towns of Linda and Gormanston. A branch of the St John's Ambulance Association was established at the mines.<sup>164</sup>

As with many mining towns around Australia, alcohol consumption in Queenstown was very high and concerned the Company. It was argued that heavy drinking in mining communities resulted from the lack of social amenities and activities for men who drank to gain relief from the trying conditions. Brian Kennedy, in his social history on Broken Hill, contends that the speculative boom created an emotional atmosphere and 'everybody drank in the general madness.'<sup>165</sup> The men's reliance on hotels as a social outlet and the problems it created had been identified in the submissions by Whitham and many of the managers. For this reason, many of the social welfare improvements had an underlying temperance motive. The Company sought to provide boarding houses in preference to the single men residing in hotels 'where they were encouraged to spend all their surplus money on the premises.'<sup>166</sup> Carus Driffield in his response to Sticht noted the deleterious effects of drinking:

The utter absence of almost every outlet for the healthy occupation of the men's leisure time in both indoor and outdoor sports and pleasures, has necessarily given the hotels a far too prominent attraction, that has undoubtedly been detrimental to the men's welfare and inimical to the

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<sup>162</sup> C Whitham letter to R Sticht, 11 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, p. 15, AOT.

<sup>163</sup> R Murray letter to W Sawyer, 7 July 1913, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/253, pp. 962-965, AOT.

<sup>164</sup> B Sawyer Half-yearly Report to Company Secretary, 16 October 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, p. 714, AOT.

<sup>165</sup> Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale - A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, p. 25.

<sup>166</sup> R Murray letter to R. Sticht, 3 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, p. 7, AOT.

Company's interests; not only in causing good men to leave the place, but also in making many of the employees inefficient through excessive drinking.<sup>167</sup>

Basil Sawyer noted with concern that the annual Mount Lyell family picnics were being sabotaged as they had become 'subordinate to the feeding and supplying of drink to the men only.'<sup>168</sup> To limit the sale of alcohol, the Company actively fought the construction of hotels on its North Lyell<sup>169</sup> and Comstock leases. The Lyell Comstock hotel proposal was rejected by the Licensing Bench after a full and detailed submission by the Company.<sup>170</sup> As an employer, the Company was keen to reduce the effects of alcohol. On occasions the Company would seek to help long-term employees suffering with drinking problems by posting them to outlying areas that were "dry", including Lyell Comstock, Chester and Lake Margaret.<sup>171</sup>

The Company's welfare provisions quickly produced results, with skilled miners of an improved character being attracted into the workforce. Many former employees returned to the field. Proving popular was the Company's purchase of cottages about the various mining leases and their subsequent resale on reasonable terms to existing employees, including migrants, enabling them to bring their wives to the Field.<sup>172</sup> The official employment figures reflected the success of the Company's various welfare ventures, with the March 1913 total of 1,492 men having increased significantly to 1,975 by the end of the following year.<sup>173</sup> Union unrest diminished, Sawyer reporting that industrial matters had been uneventful during the time.<sup>174</sup>

The outbreak of World War 1 created much uncertainty in the mining industry. Expecting difficult times, and predicting a slump in copper prices once peace was restored, Sawyer advised the Company's workers that the decision to continue operations at the present scale had been largely influenced by humanitarian consideration for the employees and the Lyell community. In return Sawyer asked for loyal and efficient service in the 'hope that this difficult situation may be financed

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<sup>167</sup> EC Driffield letter to R. Sticht, 2 April 1913, Correspondence – Railway Department 1896-1919, NS 726/5, pp. 4-5, AOT.

<sup>168</sup> B Sawyer letter to Company Secretary, 13 January 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, p. 924, AOT.

<sup>169</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 September 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, pp. 173-174, AOT.

<sup>170</sup> R Sticht letter to Stafford Bird, 8 May 1913, Staff Letters, NS 1711/553, p. 250, AOT.

<sup>171</sup> R Sticht letter to H Clarke, 31 March 1916, Staff Letters, NS 1711/554, pp. 22-23, AOT.

<sup>172</sup> B Sawyer, letter to Company Secretary, 26 June 1914, General Manager's Inward and Outward General Correspondence, File 5/1/5, pp. 1-3, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>173</sup> The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 March 1913, p. 9, and Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1914, p. 33, Mines Department.

<sup>174</sup> B Sawyer Half-yearly Report to Directors, 17 April 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, pp. 146 & 164, AOT.

without any hardship to yourselves or your families.’<sup>175</sup> The short-term price paid for copper remained high throughout the War years. During this period the Company continued to expand its housing scheme for its employees. The workforce exceeded 1,600 men, despite high numbers enlisting for service. With the relative longevity of the Company came a new raft of welfare issues. Many employees were nearing retirement. In early 1918 Murray sought the introduction of a uniform allowance or pension for retiring employees of long standing. He considered the Company’s existing practice of providing light work at full rates to the growing numbers was no longer economically sustainable, and a form of pension or allowance should be considered.<sup>176</sup>

The Company did not act immediately on Murray’s proposal, but continued with its practice of improving the general social conditions. At the 12 February 1919 opening of the Lyell Pastime Club at Linda, which had been refurbished by the Company, Murray reiterated his Company’s commitment to the welfare program. He considered the War had advanced the need for mutual cooperation between employers and employees and the spirit had come to stay.<sup>177</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* supported the Company’s social betterment program. It endorsed Murray’s comments and the need for cooperation, advising old methods and the perpetration of class strife would not solve the changes now required to the structure of social and national life in Australia. The paper called for more ‘social reconstructors and directors even here on the West Coast – men of wide vision and large heart...who understand human nature.’<sup>178</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company was the Tasmanian pacesetter in implementing large-scale civic and employee welfare programs. Newcomer to the State, the Electrolytic Zinc (EZ) Company, instituted a similar employee welfare program. Construction of the Company’s Risdon zinc refinery, located on the western shore of the River Derwent, commenced in 1916 but it was not until January 1918 that its processing plant started production. Herbert Gepp, the Company’s first local manager, espoused similar mutual cooperation and self-help ideals to Murray. Under Gepp’s management, a Cooperative Council was established in October 1918. It administered welfare initiatives that included selling drapery and groceries. The Council’s entry into the retail market preceded those at Mount Lyell and may well have been a catalyst for the Company to

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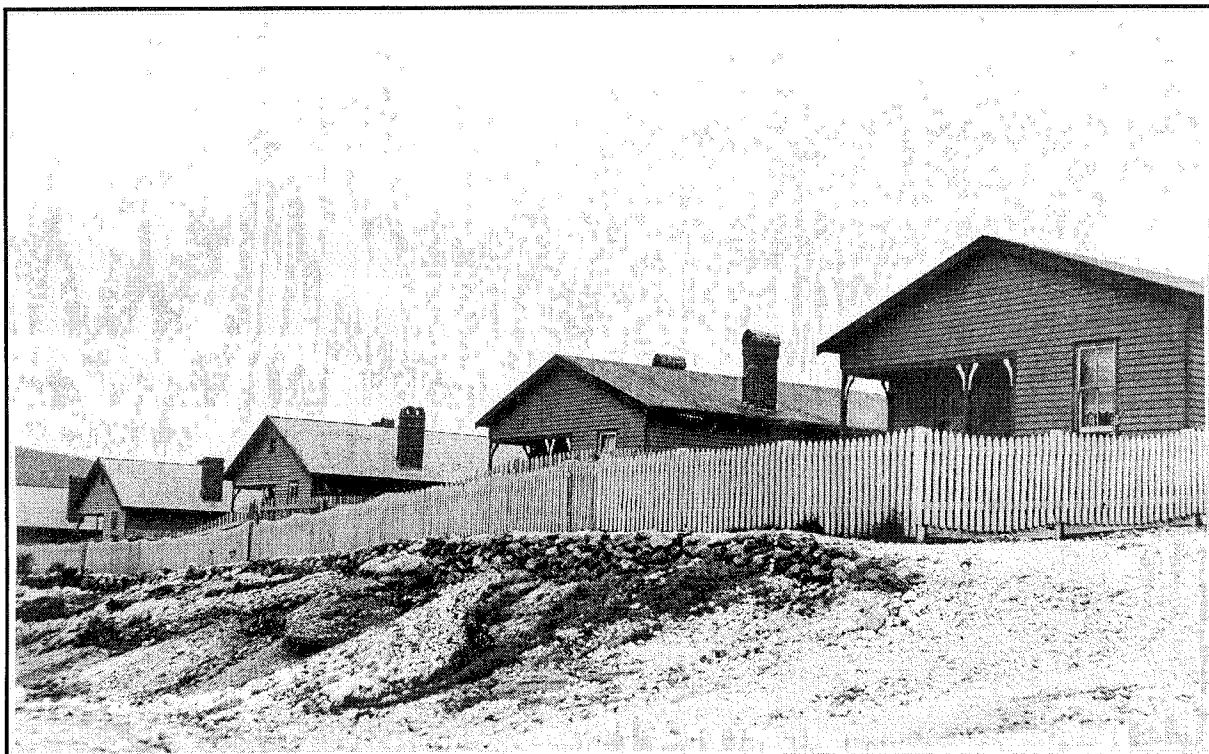
<sup>175</sup> B Sawyer circular to Staff, 12 August 1914, Notices and Circulars, NS 1711/445, pages unnumbered.

<sup>176</sup> R Murray letter to W Sawyer, 1 February 1918, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/255, pp. 666-670, AOT.

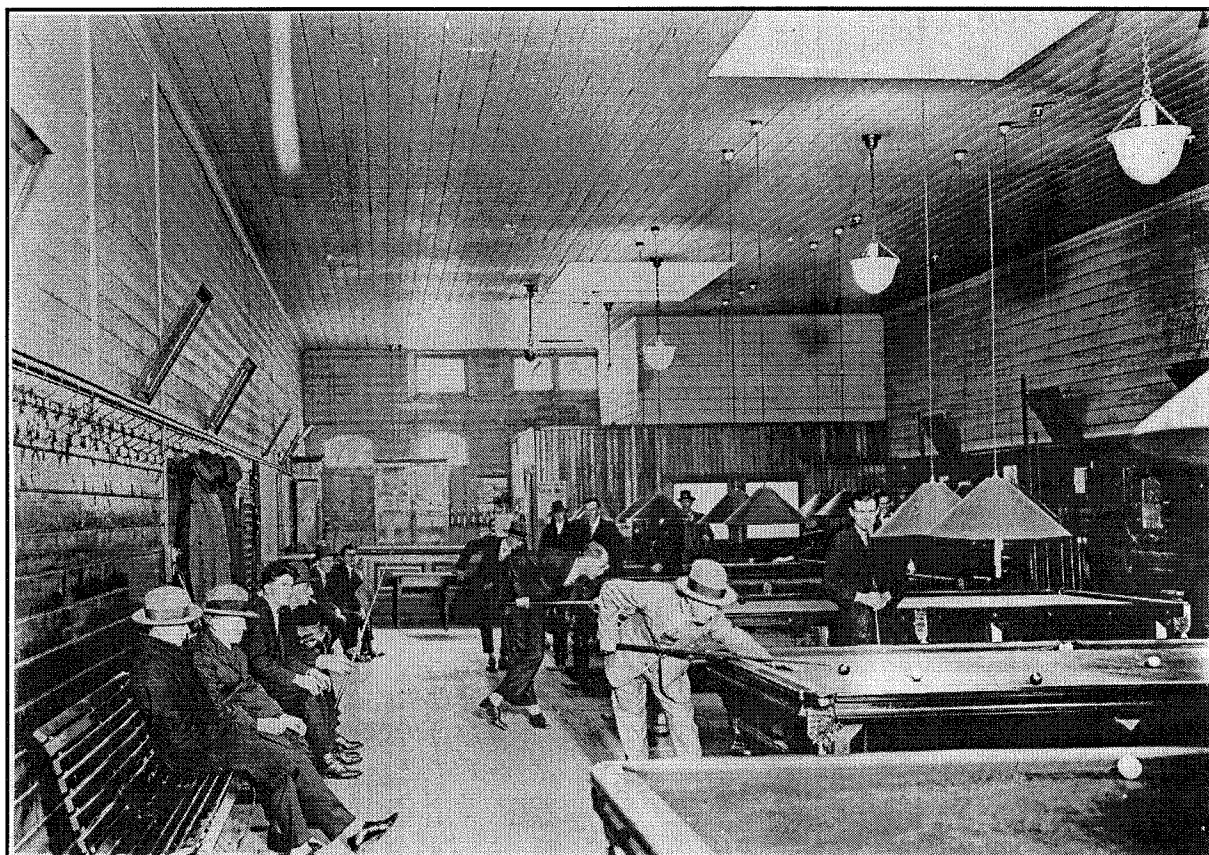
<sup>177</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 February 1919.

<sup>178</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 February 1919.





NEW COMPANY HOUSES AT GORMANSTON – c. 1920



SOCIAL CLUB FOR WORKERS, QUEENSTOWN – c. 1920



expand from butchers' shops into general retail activities.<sup>179</sup> Under the Cooperative Council's supervision, various welfare activities were introduced. Successful initiatives included its housing scheme in 1919, a medical service in 1920 and a dental clinic the following year. Over the years, the EZ Company ensured that the Cooperative's activities were both profit-sharing and served as insurance against industrial troubles.<sup>180</sup>

Another Tasmanian industry to initiate social welfare improvements for its employees was the chocolate maker, Cadbury-Fry Pascal. The firm had an established history of introducing social welfare initiatives in England,<sup>181</sup> a fact previously noted by Wright and Whitham. In 1920 Cadbury-Fry Pascal purchased land at Triffetts Point, on the Derwent River, to the north of Hobart. Partly recreating its English operations, the Company built its factory, twenty-four houses, a recreation ground, tennis courts and converted an old military hospital into a social hall, all within picturesque garden surrounds. The Company also 'set up reserves along the foreshore, built a Quaker Hall, gave land for a school, and greatly helped many local activities. They encouraged their employees to play sport and also encouraged a high moral tone.'<sup>182</sup>

In 1919 the Mount Lyell Company entered a new era in its welfare activities. It sought practical ways to reduce the cost of living. The Board considered establishing a joint employer and employee retail outlet, modelled along the lines of the Port Pirie Cooperative Society at the Broken Hill Company's smelting plant in South Australia. It was run by the men but supported financially by the Company. As with Mount Lyell, the Port Pirie operations had suffered from labour shortages. By adopting an enlightened self-interest agenda, it successfully resolved the problem by implementing health, education and housing programs. In return the Company reaped the benefits of increased production.<sup>183</sup>

At the same time the Broken Hill Company was planning to inject £50,000 into the Broken Hill Hospital and Returned Soldiers' Association, the Mount Lyell Board allocated a similar amount for welfare improvements, to be spent on a broader and deep-reaching basis. The £50,000 was a considerable amount, comparing favourably to the £45,795 it had spent since early 1913, the majority of which had been allocated to

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<sup>179</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 12 July 1919.

<sup>180</sup> A Alexander, *The Zinc Works – Producing Zinc at Risdon 1916-1991*, Risdon, Pasminco Metals, 1992, pp. 15-16, 28-35.

<sup>181</sup> R Barton, 'Cadburys at Claremont – An Antipodean Bournville?' unpublished BA Honours Thesis, History Department, University of Tasmania, 1981, pp. 11-14.

<sup>182</sup> A Alexander, *Glenorchy 1804-1964*, Glenorchy, Glenorchy City Council, 1986, pp. 168-174.

<sup>183</sup> Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale – A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, p. 161.

housing the miners at Gormanston and Linda.<sup>184</sup> Sticht considered it important to identify the root of the problems affecting local civic and individual life within the region and spend the money on rectifying these ingrained issues. Consistent with the “new wave” of welfare practices adopted by large industrial enterprises since the end of the War, the Board resuscitated the Lyell field ‘along modern sociological lines, for the purpose of bringing the Company’s activity to a standard conformable to its importance as a producer of metals.’<sup>185</sup>

Russell Murray enjoyed a strong empathy with his workforce. He wanted to improve leisure and recreational facilities throughout the region. Low cost housing, food and clothing were essential. Murray did not support cooperative stores as he believed the men would mismanage such an enterprise. The Company’s successful operation of its butcher’s shop in Gormanston since March 1919 had confirmed that businesses could be run at a small profit, while reducing the retail price of meat by one third. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) fully supported the Company in its butchery venture. It was keen to see the Company compete in other retail areas. Murray also advocated annual holidays be granted on full pay, the introduction of holiday allowances, the provision of cheap railway excursion fares and the appointment of a permanent Welfare Committee to oversee ongoing works. He again mooted the need for a superannuation fund for employees and sought to make Gormanston self-contained by providing a broader range of shops and services. Fresh milk and social clubs were essential and travel to Queenstown was in need of upgrading with the introduction of a modern motor service.<sup>186</sup>

Seeking guidance, Sticht organised a plebiscite and canvassed opinions from random Company staff members on the welfare issues they considered to be most important. The top three proved to be housing, co-operative societies and weekend excursion trains.<sup>187</sup> As the economic environment tightened, proposals to introduce holiday pay, wage bonuses and a superannuation scheme were deferred. A welfare committee was appointed and given powers to allocate welfare money to community projects.<sup>188</sup> The welfare program continued on a broad front, with £27,570 spent in the

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<sup>184</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 March 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, p. 208, AOT.

<sup>185</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 March 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 192-197, AOT.

<sup>186</sup> R Murray letter to R Sticht, 21 April 1919, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/256, pp. 41-56, AOT.

<sup>187</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 25 November 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 887-915, AOT.

<sup>188</sup> R Sticht to Company Secretary, 27 January 1920, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/337, p. 62, AOT.

year ending 30 September 1920. Housing was again the main recipient with £13,498 spent. The Company owned 100 houses in Gormanston and another 68 scattered about the district. A new Company dwelling was built at a rate of one every two or three weeks. Other benefits included a rental purchase scheme for houses at Queenstown, the sponsoring of YMCA and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) clubs and the erection of separate maternity and infectious diseases wards at the Lyell District Hospital. The Company had also contributed towards the cost of the newly completed Technical School in Queenstown. In the seven years since 1913 the Company spent a total of £85,367 on welfare related items.<sup>189</sup>

A proud Robert Sticht reported to his Board on 21 October 1920 that 'as a result of all these benefits, taken together with the low rates of house rent obtaining in the Lyell district, the latter now constitutes the cheapest living locality in the Commonwealth, according to official determinations.'<sup>190</sup> Improvements continued. The picnic area at the West Strahan beach was upgraded, the first of the cheaper excursion trains commenced running on 7 November 1920<sup>191</sup> and the Lettes Bay holiday houses were completed some months later. The Company extended its retail operations. Two butchers shops were opened in Gormanston on 14 March 1919,<sup>192</sup> followed by a butchers shop in Queenstown on 30 July 1920.<sup>193</sup> Hoping further to reduce the prices of basic commodities, the Company opened a general retail store in Gormanston in July 1920. The effects were immediate. The Company set prices slightly below those charged by Moran & Cato in Melbourne. This action forced the Queenstown shops to lower their returns on the important foodstuffs to match the Company's prices.<sup>194</sup>

The next few years proved difficult for both the Company and the Lyell community. Copper prices fell and production costs increased. Employee numbers fell to 942 in December 1922.<sup>195</sup> While copper prices remained low, the Company remained solvent by cutting production costs under Russell Murray, its new manager.

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<sup>189</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 3 December 1920, Letterbook relating to Welfare Work conducted by the Company, NS 1711/546, pp. 83-96, AOT.

<sup>190</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statement of Accounts for the Year ending 30 September 1920, p. 33, Queenstown.

<sup>191</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 18 March 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, p. 196, AOT.

<sup>192</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 November 1920, Letterbook relating to Welfare Work conducted by Company, NS 1711/546, p. 67, AOT.

<sup>193</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 13 August 1920, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/338, p. 22, AOT.

<sup>194</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 August 1920, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/338, p. 76, AOT.

<sup>195</sup> Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1922, p. 18, Mines Department.

As the economy improved, Murray implemented the voluntary superannuation scheme. Commencing on 1 January 1925, the staff members and Company each contributed the equivalent of 2.5 per cent of the salaries into the fund. The proceeds were redeemable when the employee reached sixty-two years.<sup>196</sup> Murray concluded after his 1926 tour of mining centres about the world that welfare 'does not appear to receive the same attention as is given to it by the large companies in Australia.'<sup>197</sup>

On the West Coast, the EZ Company established a large concentrating mill and an extensive housing estate at Rosebery for its workers. Building commenced around 1928 but were delayed by the onset of the Depression on the West Coast in early 1930. It was not until 19 February 1936 that the mill was eventually commissioned. A Cooperative Council and similar welfare schemes were established and were run on a similar basis to the Risdon operations. As a leader in its field, the welfare efforts of the Mount Lyell Company were well regarded. The *Advocate*, on reviewing the well-being of mining towns on the West Coast in 1926, commented: 'it is at Lyell where co-operation between employer and employes (sic) has produced the best results. The Mount Lyell Company has always been noted for the manner in which it has endeavored to promote the general welfare of its employees...with the result that such institutions as hospitals, schools, and wholesome recreational establishments are well equipped, and in a flourishing condition.'<sup>198</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company's commendable efforts in advancing workplace and community welfare attracted considerable mainland attention. Representatives from the Queensland Royal Mining Commission inspected the Company's operations in November 1929 and expressed full satisfaction at the workers' facilities, the Company's housing and other sociological activities and staff management practices.<sup>199</sup> The Mount Lyell Company's welfare activities were expansive and ranged from supplying power and lighting to towns, contributing to public infrastructure, amenities and services, assisting social clubs, sport and recreational activities, retail trading, housing, farming pursuits and caring for its workforce. Murray, in summing up his Company's activities, commented:

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<sup>196</sup> Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Minutes, 31 December 1924, Volume 11, pp. 1-2, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>197</sup> R Murray, letter to Company Secretary, 6 January 1927, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/348, pp. 422, 443-445, AOT.

<sup>198</sup> *Advocate*, 11 March 1926.

<sup>199</sup> R Murray, letter to Company Secretary, 15 November 1929, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/351, pp. 259-260, AOT.

Almost the whole of the community at Mount Lyell, including Queenstown, Gormanston and Linda, are employed either directly or indirectly by the Mount Lyell Company...The Company, therefore, in providing any facilities or benefits, does not restrict them to its own employees, but makes them available to the people at large. The Company has interested itself not only in assisting in providing recreation, but has taken numerous steps to make the cost of living as low as possible and to render living conditions comfortable.<sup>200</sup>

By providing the vast range of social benefits for the workers and the wider community, the Company was in a dominant position to earn employee loyalty and, importantly, introduce work place reform with minimal discontent.

## Conclusions

The early settlers of the Lyell area had to cope with great adversity from the elements as they fought to establish a footing in an isolated and hostile environment. The Company was quick to adapt, utilising water resources about Mount Lyell in a number of innovative ways. Stories of the lifestyles and events within the region were often exaggerated. The *Mount Lyell Standard* reported the perception that the men on “The Wild West Coast” were hard drinking, brawling and anti-social characters. It advised that the West Coast was ‘a fruitful source of astonishment to the peaceful residents of Hobart.’<sup>201</sup> Such misconceptions were long-lasting and not easily corrected. The *Zeehan & Dundas Herald* praised the Mount Lyell Company for its energy and enterprise, and paid credit to the Queenstown population for transforming the town from a barren wilderness of swamp and scrub into an admirable settlement. These efforts were achieved in the two years following the destructive Penghana fire. The paper considered the town to be ‘peopled by a community which for progressive ideas, business energy and general go-aheadism, will compare favourably with any mining community in Australia, and it must be remembered that it is a community of workers where every man has to do his share.’<sup>202</sup>

In the early years the Company refrained from seeking a strong paternal relationship with its employees. It did not wish to become a benevolent institution. It was, however, a good corporate citizen, and provided monetary and material assistance for projects of a civic benefit. The Company influenced decisions and shaped community direction by facilitating the appointments of experienced staff onto boards, committees, trusts and community groups. Sticht used his influential position in the community to gain political clout to ensure the government was attentive to the

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<sup>200</sup> R Murray letter to Mr Bain, 29 May 1925, Personal Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/62, pp. 80-85.

<sup>201</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 June 1899.

<sup>202</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 January 1899.

important issues of the day. This policy worked extremely well in the first decade of operations. The Company was able to directly and indirectly manipulate events to achieve desired outcomes. This was evident from its handling of the medical and health services schemes that rendered the AMA ineffectual, and gave the Company control and stability in its mines for nearly a decade.

As the community matured, the population, particularly the womenfolk, sought improved living standards,. The extremely wet climate exacerbated the cramped living conditions at home and the lack of social amenities available to families. Women and children left the Lyell area for warmer and drier climates. Sticht observed the gradual breakdown of the family unit. Attempting to arrest the situation in 1909, he sought the Board's approval to implement a housing refurbishment scheme for loyal staff members. Unfortunately, it was too little too late. General unrest among the mining communities of Gormanston, Linda and North Lyell followed, their populations suffering higher costs of living, poorer housing standards and worse climatic conditions than that of their Queenstown neighbours. Discontent was rife in the mines. Strikes and the North Lyell fire followed in quick succession.

Disgruntled workers and families departed the region in their droves, forcing the Company to consider the social wellbeing of its workforce. No longer could the Company regard its labour force as a component of cost production. The new approach worked with stunning effect. Housing, working and social amenities were targeted on a broad scale. The Company's genuine caring and sharing attitude united the community and produced a positive feeling that repaired many old wounds. Employee numbers steadily grew. The Mount Lyell Company became the first major industrial entity in Tasmania to introduce a broad-ranging social welfare scheme for its workforce. Similar to the Cadbury experience in England, the Company had acknowledged the link between isolation and welfare to develop 'a committed and efficient workforce.'<sup>203</sup>

After the end of the First World War the mood for mutual cooperation spread worldwide. It was an era of profound change, and featured industrial turmoil, falling commodity prices and intense class conflict. Despite a flagging mineral market, the Mount Lyell Company remained committed to the spirit of enlightenment, further expanding its welfare activities. The Company dominated a reliant community. Facing limited union resistance it restructured its workforce, implemented new treatment processes and instigated innovative reforms. The men benefited through improved workplace and social conditions, the Company was rewarded with greater productivity,

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<sup>203</sup> Barton, 'Cadburys at Claremont – An Antipodean Bournville?', p. 28.

a loyal workforce and improved profits. The Mount Lyell Company became the dominant copper producer in Australia. The timely gains won through this period placed it on a sufficiently solid footing to escape the fallout of the upcoming worldwide depression.

Because of the isolation of the Lyell field, the Company was overlooked as a true pioneer in welfare reform in Tasmania, if not Australia. At the time the *Advocate* observed that people from other parts of the Commonwealth had little concept of the wide-ranging advantages enjoyed by the Lyell communities.<sup>204</sup> Blainey identifies the extent of the mutual cooperation:

For working men and their families Mt Lyell had long offered a high level of social security. The company had maintained full employment, cheap housing, a good standard of living, and an unrivalled health scheme; for some forty years it is doubtful if the employees in any other large Australian mining field had received such a high proportion of the wealth won from the mines. In the same period no Australian mining field had been so free from social and economic upheaval as Mount Lyell.<sup>205</sup>

The following chapter looks at the early development of the many towns and settlements about the region, and the dominant roll of the Mount Lyell Company in deciding many of their destinies.

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<sup>204</sup> *Advocate*, 3 October 1925.

<sup>205</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 298.

## CHAPTER 7: CIVILISING THE FRONTIER – 1893-1935

### Introduction

The major challenge facing governments, councils, town boards, progress committees and benevolent companies in their attempts to regulate and foster the development of settlements in the Lyell region was their early inability to prevent squatters taking up occupation on prime land close to their workplaces. In many instances, little thought was given to the future expansion of the mines or smelters, the likelihood of toxic emissions, or the unsuitability of the site for domestic use. Squatting created potential health and safety risks to residents, greatly frustrated the authorities and generated considerable hostility among those who had been patient and had paid high prices for their legitimate holdings. The earliest problem with squatters on the Lyell field was at the smelter construction village of Penghana. Housing conditions were poor and the sanitary services non-existent. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* observed that ‘the difficulty of the social pioneers in these new mining settlements is that their requirements spring up with such mushroom-like growth that the Government cannot keep pace with them...the issue really rests with the residents themselves, and the sanitation of their town is, to a great extent, in their own hands.’<sup>1</sup>

Squatting on Crown land was an accepted ritual on many Australian mining fields. In the Queensland mining town of Mount Perry the practice stemmed from the uncertainty of the mining ventures and from the failure of authorities to have freehold land available to purchase at the beginning of the boom.<sup>2</sup> In Broken Hill the issue of land occupation was viewed as a bungle from the beginning. It was only resolved in 1887 when the government provided the squatters with a legal claim under a miner’s right.<sup>3</sup> Closer to home, on the West Coast, land occupation created considerable hostility at Zeehan. To avoid potential health problems arising from miners locating their homes on the low lying ground close to the adits, the government had surveyed a new town on higher ground, well distant from the mines. On 27 November 1890 the new lots were thrown open to claimants. The process generated considerable dissatisfaction, particularly when out of town speculators snapped up most of the land. Many bona fide miners were ‘left out in the cold.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 July 1895.

<sup>2</sup> M Royle, *Perry’s Past – A Centenary History of Perry Shire*, Mount Perry, Perry Shire Council, 1980, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode - Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger Pty Ltd, 1988, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> W Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, Zeehan, Evershed Brothers, 1891, p. 29.



Not only were the Zeehan miners forced to move their huts, they were also obliged to pay exorbitant prices for the town lots. According to the local Church of England minister, Reverend Frederick Copeland, the whole process was viewed as 'an offence to the freedom of the miner...the inhabitants steadily squatted where they were and, instead of the town disappearing, it continued to grow in the place chosen by the people...eventually the Government gave way and sold blocks at a handsome profit.'<sup>5</sup> To avoid repetitions of the Zeehan bungle, the government sought to survey new town sites at an early stage, as soon as the need for a permanent settlement was established. Because of its isolated nature and testing climate, the West Coast was not subjected to the sudden influx of diggers. During the Victorian gold rush in the 1850's the Ararat field catered for as many as 50,000 people at a time, while other camps fleetingly held 30,000 for a week or two.<sup>6</sup>

The Tasmanian government faced a number of challenges from squatters at Penghana, Queenstown, Kelly Basin, North Lyell and Strahan. This chapter examines the practical and political difficulties in dealing with the squatters, culminating in Edward Mulcahy's brave but effective solution - forcible evictions. The Mount Lyell Company endorsed government's action as it faced potential disruptions to both its smelting and mining operations through the illegal occupations by squatters on its reserve. The Company's interest in property matters and influence over the regional demographics spread considerably after its May 1903 takeover of the North Mount Lyell operations.

The rationale behind locating the pre 1893 settlements within the region has been discussed in Chapter 1. The major urbanisation occurred in the latter half of the 1890s, about the Mount Lyell area. By 1901 Queenstown, Gormanston, Linda and North Lyell had established to a significant degree. Located within three miles of each other, they competed for government assistance. Suffering varying levels of isolation due to geographical barriers and poor transport facilities, the towns developed independently. Inadequate sanitary amenities and poor quality drinking water threatened sustainable development. Government sought to provide direction by identifying and surveying suitable town sites and, where necessary, moved to prevent squatters settling outside these areas. Government assistance alone could not ensure the survival and prosperity. It was the Mount Lyell Company that became the benefactor. Without its support towns

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<sup>5</sup> FG Copeland, *In the Wild, Wet, West of Tasmania; Stories of Zeehan and the West Coast of Tasmania during the 1890's*, Accounts written 1894-1901, compiled by John Copeland, Adelaide, 1998, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> G Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2003, pp. 59-60.

struggled and eventually disappeared. This chapter examines the dominant role played by the Company in controlling urbanisation within the region.

The Company's assistance to individual communities varied considerably, and depended upon strategic importance, physical location, and its general disposition towards the inhabitants. The Company strove to ensure the major settlements of Queenstown and Gormanston were well catered for, and its employees and their families enjoyed modern facilities. Lynchford and Strahan did not enjoy the same high-level support and were largely left to their own devices. They survived a decline in population by developing new opportunities, including a variety of rural activities. This chapter outlines the early struggles endured by the settlements as they fought to establish a footing amid the frontier wilderness.

In this chapter the settlements are grouped by common themes. The Queen River Valley towns all came under the broad envelope of the company's smelting and timber harvesting operations. The mining towns about Mount Lyell were all exposed to extremes in weather conditions and suffered a greater degree of isolation and, generally, had fewer services and amenities. The once substantial towns along the North Mount Lyell railway all suffered similar fates under the Mount Lyell Company's regime, while many small settlements scattered along the Abt line to Regatta Point survived. Strahan and the outlying rural areas provided recreational opportunities and vital fresh produce for the Lyell mining field. Blainey, in his book *The Peaks of Lyell*, provides the authoritative history of the Lyell region, particularly with reference to the Mount Lyell Company's operations. In Blainey's words, he has woven the important issues into the narrative.<sup>7</sup> As such, his text covers the generalities of urbanisation but it is generally deficient in detail, particularly for the smaller towns about the region. This chapter seeks to provide a broader depth of understanding of those settlements.

### **Settlements in the Queen River Valley**

The three towns in the Queen River Valley, Penghana, Queenstown and Lynchford, depended on the Mount Lyell Company for survival. The extent and duration of the Company's contribution is examined in the following section.

The site chosen for the Mount Lyell Company's reduction works was on the eastern side of the Queen River, immediately above the confluence of its three tributaries, the West, Middle and East Branches. For this reason the area was initially

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<sup>7</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 351.

known both as Queen Forks<sup>8</sup> and Queen Crossing.<sup>9</sup> In the final months of 1894 the smelters site had been cleared, substantial brickworks erected and a small township established.<sup>10</sup> The village's population quickly increased to around 200.<sup>11</sup> By March 1895 six general stores and four butcher's shops had been established.<sup>12</sup> The Company encouraged settlement on its Reserve provided that it was not permanent and was only occupied by construction workers requiring temporary residence close to the works. By 27 May 1895 Robert Sticht considered it was time to serve notice on the Queen Crossing residents to quit the Reserve as survey works had commenced on the government's permanent township further down the Queen Valley.<sup>13</sup>

The establishment of the second settlement in the district created considerable confusion. Reference to Queen Crossing gradually disappeared,<sup>14</sup> being replaced by the name Penghana.<sup>15</sup> It was intended to apply the name Penghana to the government's new township, as the huts and cottages were to be removed from the Company's reserve.<sup>16</sup> The government subsequently decided against using the name Penghana for the new town, preferring Pokana.<sup>17</sup> The name Pokana<sup>18</sup> proved unpopular and on 31 August 1895 it was changed to Queenstown.<sup>19</sup> Penghana was retained as the name for the area around the smelters and its temporary village.<sup>20</sup> Sticht realised that the ongoing retention of the Penghana village would limit the operations and future expansion of the smelters and sought to hasten its demise. In June 1895 he advised construction workers that once the smelters had been completed 'no employee will be retained, or taken into

<sup>8</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 November 1894.

<sup>9</sup> Queen Crossing was also abbreviated to the "Crossing" as per report *Zeehan Dundas Herald*, 13 March 1895.

<sup>10</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 27 November 1894.

<sup>11</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 31 January 1895.

<sup>12</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 March 1895.

<sup>13</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 May 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, Non-State Records (NS) 1711/309, p. 18, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>14</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 12 March 1895, p. 715, the Penghana Post Office was located at Queen River Forks, via Strahan, effective 1 March 1895.

<sup>15</sup> According to JA Taylor in his publication *Tasmanian Place Names – The Aboriginal Connection*, Launceston, J Taylor, c. 1996, p. 96, Penghana was the Aboriginal term for 'river ford.'

<sup>16</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 April 1895. The paper noted that the buildings at Queen Crossing were to be resited to Penghana, which was a little over a mile from the Crossing, located between two hills, and having a good supply of water at hand.

<sup>17</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1894, 1895, paper 39, p. 13. Refer also *Hobart Gazette* 23 July 1895, p. 1355.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Tasmanian Place Names – The Aboriginal Connection*, the word Pokana is not directly identified but has a connotation of water (bays and rivers) and rain, p. 98. According to the *Zeehan & Dundas Herald* of 15 June 1895, the name Pokana was used so as to avoid any confusion with township of Pyengana, which was situated on the George's River, in northeastern Tasmania.

<sup>19</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 3 September 1895.

<sup>20</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 14 May 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 14, AOT. Sticht confirms the broader application of the name, advising of his move from Gormanston to his "temporary quarters" at Penghana, his new cottage being located near the smelters.



PENGHANA TOWNSHIP - c. 1896



PENGHANA AND MOUNT LYELL COMPANY SMELTERS - c. 1896

the service of the Company, in or about the Machinery-Site who does not reside at the proposed township [Queenstown].<sup>21</sup> Sticht's attempts were temporarily thwarted by the poor road access and the high prices being paid in Queenstown by speculators. By November 1896 the construction workforce numbered 600, causing further expansion of the Penghana settlement near the works.<sup>22</sup> Sticht was eager to prevent further development on the low-lying area below the smelters as it was required for a slag dump.<sup>23</sup>

Effectively prevented from building at Penghana, and unable to buy land in Queenstown, many workers sited their huts midway between the two settlements. This action was frowned upon as the land was poorly drained, lacked proper sanitary facilities and was still within the Company's reserved land.<sup>24</sup> Penghana had a ramshackle appearance and its facilities were totally inadequate. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* noting that the 'accumulations of filth which are allowed to gather in the main thoroughfare are simply appalling.'<sup>25</sup> The confined conditions and inadequate fire fighting facilities eventually contributed to the settlement being razed by fire on the 12 December 1896. Starting in the scrub behind the Converter Works, and fanned by strong winds, the blaze skirted the Company's main buildings and destroyed most of Penghana and other improvements as it swept down the valley towards Queenstown. It was estimated that over 150 structures were destroyed in the inferno, including huts, business houses, boarding rooms and the skittle alley.<sup>26</sup>

The government sought to assist the 200 homeless people by surveying more allotments within the Queenstown town boundary.<sup>27</sup> Two days after the fire Sticht warned that the Company's tolerance of the squatters would cease, with houses, huts, tents, camps, or otherwise now forbidden on its reserve.<sup>28</sup> Shortly afterwards Sticht advised that the Company would issue notices to the remaining Penghana residents to remove their buildings within three months. The *Mount Lyell Standard* upheld the Company's decision, advising 'the present occupants of land at the Crossing will soon be required to quit, and when Penghana as a village is no more, one of the dirtiest places

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<sup>21</sup> R Sticht letter to Alfred Pillinger, 5 June 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 43, AOT.

<sup>22</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 November 1896.

<sup>23</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 17 April 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/310, p. 403, AOT.

<sup>24</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1896.

<sup>25</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 August 1896.

<sup>26</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 12 December 1896.

<sup>27</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 December 1896.

<sup>28</sup> R Sticht notice to the Public, 14 December 1896, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/311, p. 223, AOT.

in Tasmania will have ceased to exist.<sup>29</sup> Occupation at Penghana lingered for another year and in November 1897 Sticht informed the Board that a large number of residents had been told to quit the site and all were complying as fast as circumstances permitted.<sup>30</sup> By April 1898 seventy residents still remained. Sticht successfully threatened dismissal to those employees who had not removed before 15 May, which saw twenty men accept inducements to secure building allotments in Queenstown.<sup>31</sup>

The initial development of Queenstown was a drawn out affair. Pegging of residential areas commenced by early April 1895,<sup>32</sup> which galvanised the Queen Crossing residents into seeking assurances from the government that lots would be offered as residential licenses. It was argued that an auction of the freehold titles would not promote development by bona-fide residents but would attract the attention of wealthy capitalists intent on speculating.<sup>33</sup> By June 1895 Charles Selby Wilson, the District Surveyor, had surveyed and permanently marked the first ninety-six lots within the new town.<sup>34</sup> The government partially allayed the local fears by announcing that it intended to set aside a portion of the town site for residential licenses but it also reserved the right 'to dispose of the balance in the usual manner, viz, by auction to the highest bidder.'<sup>35</sup>

Even though the first sales were yet to occur, the community moved to elect a progress committee to ensure essential issues could be resolved at an early stage. The dominance of the Mount Lyell Company in community matters was apparent, with both Sticht and E Carus Driffield elected to the committee. Although only a recent arrival to the area, Sticht's appointment as president confirmed his standing. His motives of advancing the Company's agenda were soon apparent. He advised the Mount Lyell Board that under his presidency the committee's prime objective would be 'to facilitate and expedite the removal of Penghana to the new township site.'<sup>36</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* acknowledged the considerable foresight shown by the residents in electing a public-spirited and energetic committee. A strong representative body was considered a necessary ingredient for the young mining community to establish on a

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<sup>29</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 19 December 1896.

<sup>30</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 29 November 1897, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/312, p. 742, AOT.

<sup>31</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 7 April 1898, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/314, pp. 193-194, AOT.

<sup>32</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 April 1895.

<sup>33</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 May 1895.

<sup>34</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1894, 1895, paper 39, p.13.

<sup>35</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 June 1895.

firm footing. The paper rued Zeehan's lost opportunities during that mining town's formative years, its early social pioneers having encountered considerable difficulty in gaining recognition from government. The Queenstown community was unlikely to suffer the same fate as Zeehan. Its committee would preside over the needs of the emerging mining area 'until the settlement attains the dignity of a town, with a legally constituted body.'<sup>37</sup>

The initial auction for the Queenstown land was scheduled to be held in Strahan on 23 August 1895. The reserve prices on the fifty-six lots were set at twenty and thirty pounds.<sup>38</sup> Forty lots sold on the day yielding £1,718; an average of £42 19s. per lot. The highest price paid was £160 for Lot 5, located on the corner of Orr and Sticht Streets. The sale results were viewed with general satisfaction and were considered 'a fair criterion of local opinion as to the permanency of the mining settlement.'<sup>39</sup> The first lots auctioned comprised good level land, the government being keen to recoup maximum returns. However, the sections set aside for occupation by residential licence were far less attractive. Sticht considered them 'not particularly desirable, being either swamp or steep hillside.'<sup>40</sup> Using his influence, Sticht negotiated the release of much improved land for the Company's employees and on 15 November he oversaw the balloting of the land. Sticht was quick to advise the Minister for Lands that the business community and new owners were most desirous to have the streets constructed during the upcoming drier months. From the Company's perspective it was important that the workers establish a 'permanent domicile in Queenstown as against the transitory and illegal nature of residences in Penghana.'<sup>41</sup>

Despite the strong demand for land in Queenstown, initial development was slow. Inadequate transport facilities significantly hampered the importing of building materials, the situation not improving until after the 18 July 1896 completion of the Company's railway into town. Road construction was delayed because of the difficulty in obtaining labour. It was not until October that works finally commenced.<sup>42</sup> Tenders were called during October for the erection of the police station, post and telegraph

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<sup>36</sup> R Sticht letter to Chairman and Board of Directors, 10 July 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 96, AOT.

<sup>37</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 July 1895.

<sup>38</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 23 July 1895, p. 1355.

<sup>39</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 August 1895.

<sup>40</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 20 August 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 207, AOT.

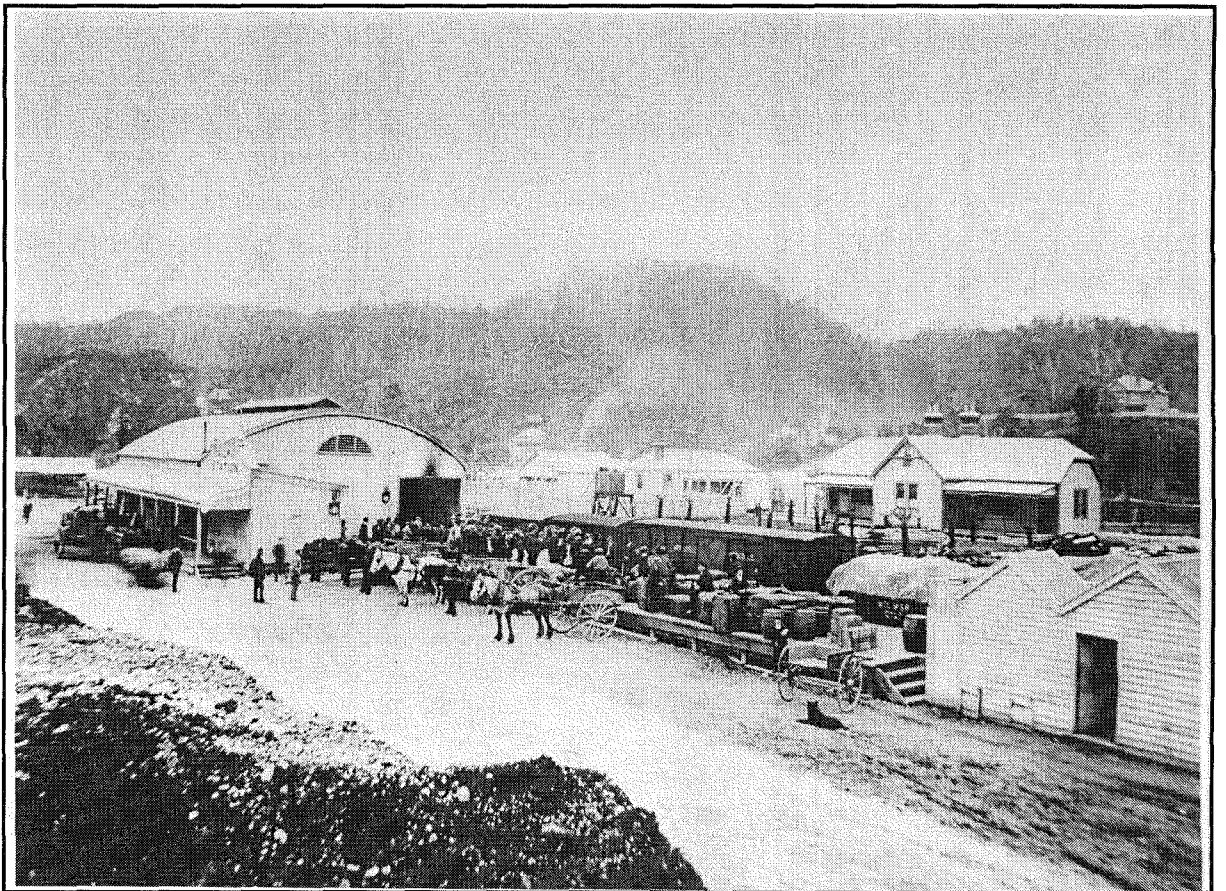
<sup>41</sup> R Sticht letter to the Minister of Lands and Works, 20 November 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, pp. 471-472, AOT.

<sup>42</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 October 1896.





QUEENSTOWN – c. 1896



QUEENSTOWN STATION – c. 1902



office, and a court house,<sup>43</sup> and in November for the building of a school and residence.<sup>44</sup> Land was then set aside for the construction of a hospital,<sup>45</sup> the existing amenity comprising a tent which housed four patients.<sup>46</sup> Providing a further impetus to building activity in town was the 12 December fire at Penghana, which accelerated the move away from its disease, squalor and noxious sulphur fumes.<sup>47</sup> The ongoing expansion of the Company's smelters contributed to the improved confidence in the new town. Demand for land in the main streets was brisk, with people from all parts of the colony keen to open up new businesses.<sup>48</sup>

Queenstown's population growth necessitated improved infrastructure works, particularly sanitation facilities. Government approved the formation of a town board to undertake the tasks. Town boundaries were identified and the election date set for 12 June 1897.<sup>49</sup> The poll saw eight nominees from which Herbert Greenwood, Richard Shepherd, Carus Driffield, Joseph Hunter and Archibald Douglas were elected. The Mount Lyell Company continued to maintain a strong presence in proceedings, with Carus Driffield appointed as the inaugural Chairman.<sup>50</sup> The first Assessment Roll for Queenstown identified 567 properties from which rates were levied.<sup>51</sup> By-laws governing the Board's activities, made in accordance with the *Town Boards Act 1891*, were passed on 28 July 1897.<sup>52</sup>

The commercial area of Queenstown provided an impressive sight, with a number of substantial brick shops and hotels. Not all growth in the town was orderly. In July 1898 Surveyor-General, Edward Counsel noted that 'the influx of population has been unprecedented on any mining field in this Colony, and where persons have "dumped down" promiscuously in all directions, that it has been quite impossible in some cases to reduce the chaotic condition of affairs.'<sup>53</sup> By May 1899 the town boasted 1,300 dwellings and a population of 5,000. The houses had spread down the Queen River valley and throughout the surrounding foothills and gullies. Its new suburbs included the "Piggery," "Raggedy," and South Queenstown.<sup>54</sup> Sticht selected a dominant hilltop

<sup>43</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 13 October 1896, p. 1739.

<sup>44</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 24 November 1896, p. 2156.

<sup>45</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 17 November 1896, p. 2142.

<sup>46</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 October 1896.

<sup>47</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 December 1896.

<sup>48</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 February 1897.

<sup>49</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 25 May 1897, pp. 942-943.

<sup>50</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 27 July 1897, p. 1289.

<sup>51</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 10 August 1897, pp. 1329-1339.

<sup>52</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 23 November 1897, pp. 2239-2244.

<sup>53</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1898, paper 56, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, p. 93.

site with vistas overlooking the town on which to build. His completed house, appropriately named "Penghana," was considered to be the finest private residence on the West Coast.<sup>55</sup>

Like Penghana, Queenstown faced a problem with squatters. The Conglomerate Creek area, located in the small valley to the south west of the smelters, comprised a number of substandard residences. It was known locally as the "Piggery," a term resented by its occupants.<sup>56</sup> Some 300 dwellings, housing 900 residents, had been built along the Creek by September 1898. Sanitary conditions were lacking but as many of the structures were located outside the town boundary the Town Board was unable to levy rates to finance new services. Those huts that were sited within the boundary, occupying residential licenses, paid only half rates. On reviewing the situation Donald Urquhart, the Attorney General and also the local member for Montagu, appreciated the Board's dilemma but he was unwilling to evict such a large body of men. Instead, Urquhart sought to amend the licence clauses to ensure full rates were levied and the services were extended.<sup>57</sup> Matters stalled, and the residents remained in occupation. The streets around Conglomerate Creek were not upgraded until 1901.<sup>58</sup>

The impact of the copper mining industry at Mount Lyell was significant. The 31 March 1901 Census revealed that copper production dominated Tasmania's export figures with a value (excluding its gold and silver content) of £1,026,748 or 34.86 per cent of the State's total exports. On a regional population basis the Mount Lyell area had assumed the mantle as the major mining centre in the State, its combined population having grown to 10,451 (3,151 dwellings), compared to Zeehan's 6,772 (1,913 dwellings) and Waratah's 4,867 (1,079 dwellings). On an individual town basis, Queenstown was the largest town on the West Coast with 5,051 inhabitants (1,377 dwellings). Zeehan was next with 5,014 (1,177 dwellings), Gormanston/North Lyell had 1,760 (240 dwellings), Strahan 1,504 (299 dwellings), Waratah 1,265 (not supplied) and Pillinger 637 (159 dwellings).<sup>59</sup>

The establishment of hotels, drinking halls and social clubs was widely reported, as were the brawling activities of the miners. In November 1900 Queenstown supported twelve hotels,<sup>60</sup> as against eighteen in Zeehan.<sup>61</sup> According to the *Mount Lyell*

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<sup>55</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 January 1898.

<sup>56</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 February 1898.

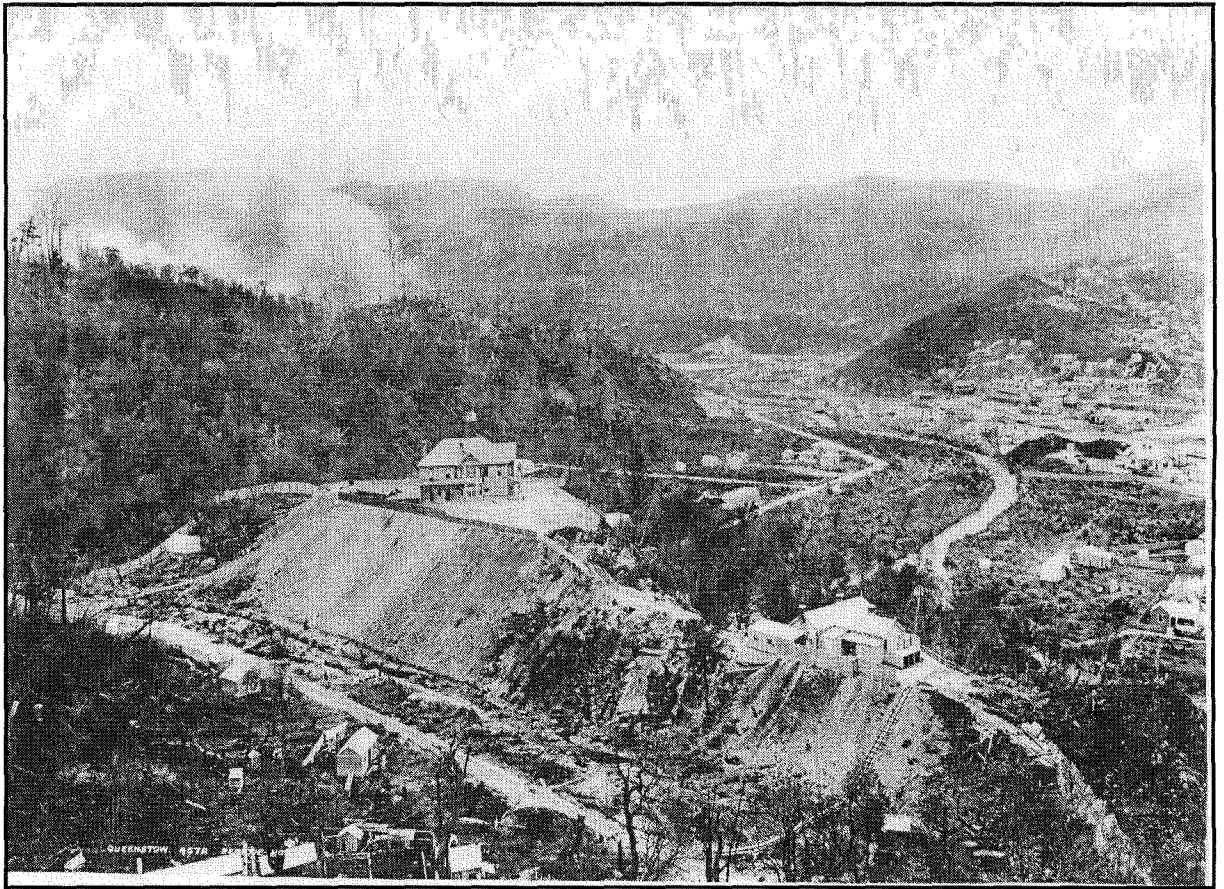
<sup>57</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 September 1898.

<sup>58</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 20 February 1901.

<sup>59</sup> JPPP, Census, 1901, 1903, paper 29, pp. viii, xcvi, 24-25.

<sup>60</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 20 November 1900, p. 2037.

<sup>61</sup> L Whitham, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People*, Hobart, Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA), 2002, p. 24.



ROBERT STICHT'S HOUSE 'PENGHANA' AT QUEENSTOWN – c. 1902



QUEENSTOWN – c. 1899

*Standard*, Hobart's population considered Queenstown to be a wild, wet frontier populated by people with questionable social lives, habits and instincts. The paper refuted the perception, advising its readers they were made out of sheer ignorance.<sup>62</sup> The 1901 Census revealed the Lyell population possessed superior educational standards when compared to many other areas of Tasmania. The district achieved the third highest proportion of persons able to read in the State (84.28%), and was only marginally behind Launceston (84.77%) and Hobart (84.54%). The Lyell population, many of whom had hailed from other States, achieved high levels of literacy and from the 4,807 of the inhabitants who could read and write, 2,989 (62%) were men. This was by far the highest proportion in the State.<sup>63</sup>

Queenstown's amenities and services were superior to that of the surrounding towns. A town reservoir and reticulated water supply was established in April 1899 and a modern telephone exchange opened on 20 September the same year.<sup>64</sup> The resolution of mining disputes and court matters was improved with the appointment of George Gilmore to the positions of Commissioner of Mines and Stipendiary Magistrate in February 1900.<sup>65</sup> Street lighting (acetylene gas) was installed in June 1901.<sup>66</sup> This service was further improved in November 1904, following agreement between the Town Board and the Mount Lyell Company, whereby the Company supplied electricity for street and domestic lighting purposes.<sup>67</sup> Queenstown's population had increased through 1904, swollen by families relocating from Gormanston, Linda and North Lyell. The town offered a cheaper cost of living and was considered a more civilised place to reside by a growing number of miners and their families.<sup>68</sup>

Queenstown presented a prosperous appearance despite its reputation as a 'barren, sulphur-smitten mining town.'<sup>69</sup> Services were available to most residences and the town offered superior amenities, including a well-equipped hospital.<sup>70</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* considered Queenstown to be:

a progressive centre, and having a number of advantages not possessed by Zeehan, it has been made a more compact and better sewered town. It has many buildings which would not bring

<sup>62</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 14 March 1900.

<sup>63</sup> JPPP, Census, 1901, 1903, paper 29, pp. 111, 163 and 186.

<sup>64</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 21 March 1899.

<sup>65</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 27 February 1900, pp. 267-268.

<sup>66</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 June 1901.

<sup>67</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 November 1904.

<sup>68</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 October 1904.

<sup>69</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 June 1919.

<sup>70</sup> HW Judd, *Pictorial Guide to the West Coast of Tasmania*, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1976, p. 113.

discredit on towns with a far larger population, its streets are well laid out, and are lighted with electricity supplied by the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>71</sup>

The 20 August 1907 proclamation of the fifty local government areas in Tasmania saw the broader Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region divided into three municipalities; Queenstown, Gormanston and Strahan.<sup>72</sup> Local governance aimed to deliver greater autonomy to the districts, providing them with a greater capacity to raise rates and loans and remove much of the cap in hand mentality. For the West Coast towns it had been ‘a long struggle against adverse conditions, thwarted instead of being stimulated and assisted by successive Ministries – exception can be made in favor of none – yet they have emerged triumphant and dependent on their own exertions.’<sup>73</sup> Council elections were held 19 December 1907, the final meeting of the Queenstown Town Board occurring on 2 January 1908. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* acknowledged the Board’s commendable efforts in being to the fore with the provision of services to the town.<sup>74</sup> The first meeting of the new Queenstown Council was held Monday 5 January 1908, with Alfred Webb elected Warden and Archibald Douglas appointed Council Clerk.<sup>75</sup>

The slow decline in the Mount Lyell Company’s workforce was reflected in the April 1911 Census. The population of the Municipality of Queenstown had fallen to 3,827, although it was still well in excess of Gormanston (2,009) and Strahan (1,011), the latter municipality having also declined during the period. Zeehan’s population had increased marginally to 5,726 people, and it temporarily reclaimed the mantle as the largest mining town.<sup>76</sup> The fall in Queenstown’s numbers could be explained by the deflation of the copper boom and through the implementation of labour-saving measures at the smelters.<sup>77</sup> The years before World War 1 proved difficult for Queenstown. As mentioned in previous chapters, a series of strikes followed by the fire at the North Lyell mine had caused considerable instability in the Company’s work force. Many miners and their families left the district, causing business confidence to wane. Through the Company’s implementation of its welfare measures the decline was soon arrested and by May 1914 building activity had again increased in Queenstown.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 December 1907.

<sup>72</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 27 August 1907, pp. 905, 920, 944-945.

<sup>73</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 January 1908.

<sup>74</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 January 1908.

<sup>75</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 January 1908.

<sup>76</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1911-12, 1912, paper 13, p. 70.

<sup>77</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 May 1911.

<sup>78</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 May 1914.

The following year the town's population again exceeded 4,000.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Zeehan had reached its zenith and by 1913 had begun to decline. Reducing grades of silver ore had led to the closure of the town's only smelter that year. Mines were progressively closed, forcing a number of the unemployed workforce to enlist following the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>80</sup>

Conditions in Queenstown remained stable during the war years, as copper prices held firm. As the war ended an outbreak of Pneumonic Influenza<sup>81</sup> was anticipated in Queenstown, carried by soldiers returning from Europe. The government approved the erection of an Infectious Diseases Block at the Lyell District Hospital, the tender being let to WJ Andrews in May 1918.<sup>82</sup> The potential effects of the influenza within the damp climate were of major concern. The Mount Lyell Company encouraged its employees to be vaccinated, particularly the high risk underground miners who worked in confined workspaces. Free inoculations were made available to the miners, Russell Murray advising the Company Secretary that all the important foremen and bosses, together with his mine office staff, had been vaccinated.<sup>83</sup> Other preparations against the disease included the construction of an inhalation chamber at Queenstown and the isolation of all visitors arriving by train, who were subjected to inhalation treatment.<sup>84</sup> Despite preventative measures, the influenza spread rapidly throughout Tasmania, the first cases reported at Queenstown and North Lyell in mid-August 1919.<sup>85</sup> Within a week, 60 per cent of the Company's workforce had contracted influenza, seriously curtailing operations.<sup>86</sup>

Vaccinations proved of little assistance. Sticht reported at the height of the epidemic (21 August) that 801 workers were absent, with only four of the twenty-five mine bosses reporting for work. As anticipated, the incidence of influenza was particularly high in the wet climate. With the local health services unable to cope, the Company organised medical assistance from Melbourne.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, due to the isolation of the Lyell region, the true nature of the influenza had not been recognised. It

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<sup>79</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1915-16, 1916, paper 34, p. 96.

<sup>80</sup> F Goldsmid, *Tasmania's West Coast - Then and Now*, Melbourne, Hawthorn Press, 1971, pp. 44-45.

<sup>81</sup> Pneumonic Influenza swept the world during the latter part of World War 1 and on into 1919. Such was the illness feared, it was declared an Infectious Disease prior to the outbreak in Tasmania - *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 6 December 1918, p. 2407.

<sup>82</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 14 May 1918, p. 1168.

<sup>83</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 7 February 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 85-86, AOT.

<sup>84</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 June 1919.

<sup>85</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 August 1919.

<sup>86</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 19 August 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 581-582, AOT.

was not until the condition was diagnosed by the Melbourne doctor that the seriousness of the situation was realised. It was apparent the men had been returning prior to full recovery, only to be struck down again with the illness. Sticht advised his Board that the outbreak 'was pneumonic from the very first, notwithstanding the opinion of the local medical talent to the contrary.'<sup>88</sup> Government records show twelve deaths from pneumonic influenza occurred in Queenstown and one in Gormanston. Queenstown was equal third highest in the State, behind Hobart and Launceston. However, the numbers were qualified as it was recognised some medical practitioners had not reported accurately.<sup>89</sup> The true impact of the disease on the Lyell community, and the favourable conditions under which it had incubated and spread, are evidenced by the twenty one deaths stated in Company records.<sup>90</sup>

A downturn in copper prices saw the Company's employee numbers reduce from 1,618 in September 1919<sup>91</sup> to 1,407 in June 1921.<sup>92</sup> The 4 April 1921 Census confirmed a reduction in the West Coast population, with Queenstown having 3,209 residents (861 dwellings), Gormanston 1,590 (418), Strahan 943 (239) and Zeehan with 3,124 (1,152).<sup>93</sup> Despite the decreasing numbers, Queenstown's facilities and welfare services continued to improve. The School of Mines opened in early March 1921, the institution embracing 'a complete scheme of technical education, and also provided for those who wished to qualify for commercial pursuits...and was equal to those in any other mining centre in Australia.'<sup>94</sup> In a cooperative approach, the Mount Lyell Company departmental heads assisted with the assessment of the practical work by apprentices. This participation was particularly innovative and was considered the only scheme of its kind in Australia.<sup>95</sup> Innovation within the home came to the fore in August 1923, upon the Council agreeing to the Company providing domestic power to Queenstown and Gormanston properties.<sup>96</sup> In January 1924 Murray reported that the

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<sup>87</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 22 August 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 598-603, AOT.

<sup>88</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 August 1919, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/336, pp. 610-611, AOT.

<sup>89</sup> JPPP, Department of Public Health Annual Report for 1919-20, 1920, paper 40, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> B Sawyer letter to R Sticht, 23 September 1919, Letterbook of the General Manager to Head Office relating to Staff Matters, NS 1711/55, not numbered, AOT.

<sup>91</sup> Employee returns for Quarter ending 30 September 1919, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/678, p. 136, AOT.

<sup>92</sup> Employee returns for Quarter ending 30 June 1921, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/679, p. 321, AOT.

<sup>93</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1920-21, 1921, paper 5, Part II p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 March 1921.

<sup>95</sup> JPPP, Education Department, Report for the Year 1932, 1933, paper 1, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> R Murray, letter to Company Secretary, 31 August 1923, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, pp. 102-106, AOT.



public was well acquainted with the domestic uses of electricity and the introduction of electrical appliances into the homes was progressing satisfactorily.<sup>97</sup>

By the mid-1920s Queenstown again presented a prosperous appearance. The Melbourne *Herald* considered it to be the best-equipped electrical town anywhere in Australia. The paper marvelled at the widespread domestic application of electricity and mused that upon its initial introduction 'you could not buy an electric cooker in Melbourne because Queenstown had rushed in and bought the whole stock in hand.'<sup>98</sup> The Company had deliberately fostered the supply of electricity into the homes as it compensated for the disadvantages caused by the region's poor climate. As the Company's fortunes improved, Queenstown's population climbed from 2,580 in 1925,<sup>99</sup> to 3,500 in 1931.<sup>100</sup> By 1935 it had grown to 4,250, well in excess of those of Gormanston (1,210), Strahan (670) and Zeehan (1,690).<sup>101</sup> Company employee numbers increased from 920 in December 1926<sup>102</sup> to 1,681 in December 1935.<sup>103</sup>

In 1923, Charles Whitham described Queenstown as a compact town with modern services, comprising red-roofed houses and white streets, nestled in an amphitheatre setting below Mount Owen.<sup>104</sup> The town's largest handicap was its comparative isolation owing to the total absence of road communication with the rest of Tasmania. Residents were aggrieved by this fact as they considered that the situation could be easily resolved.<sup>105</sup> The eventual opening of the road to traffic on 1 September 1932 finally removed the tag of "Tasmania's lost province," a term coined by Alex Marshall during his 1920 investigation into building a road between Lake St Clair and Gormanston.<sup>106</sup> Queenstown continued to survive against adversity, Murray considering that 'the Queenstown community was very prosperous, and had known nothing of the depression.'<sup>107</sup>

Located a little over three miles down the Queen River Valley from Queenstown was the small mining town of Lynchford, the oldest settlement in the Mount Lyell

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<sup>97</sup> R Murray, letter to Company Secretary, 29 January 1924, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, pp. 494-495, AOT.

<sup>98</sup> Melbourne *Herald*, 16 February 1926.

<sup>99</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1924-25, 1925, paper 54, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1931-32, 1933, paper 35, p. 19.

<sup>101</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1935-36, 1937, paper 48, p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Employee returns for Quarter ending 31 December 1926, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/682, p. 301, AOT.

<sup>103</sup> Employee returns for Quarter ending 31 December 1935, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/688, p. 242, AOT.

<sup>104</sup> C Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*, Queenstown, Robert Sticht Memorial Library, 1949, p. 67.

<sup>105</sup> *Advocate*, 16 March 1926.

<sup>106</sup> JPPP, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal, 1920, paper 12, p. 1.



district, as discussed in Chapter 1. Lynchford was strategically located at the crossing of the Queen River, on the original track between Strahan and the Linda Valley, and was central to a number of gold mines and alluvial diggings. When gold finally petered out, the town was all but deserted except for the hotel and a few buildings. Anticipating a small revival in mining fortunes, the Crown offered twenty-three lots for sale in September 1897, the reserve prices ranging between £15 and £25 per lot.<sup>108</sup> The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* predicted renewed interest. It advised its readers that ‘although the place is almost deserted at present it will be well worth while for investors to bear in mind that it is not likely to be so for long, as there is certain to be a big renewal in mining in this neglected district, and that before another year has passed.’<sup>109</sup>

The anticipated mining boom did not eventuate, the Crown selling just twelve lots over the following decade. Timber felling for the Mount Lyell Company’s fuel and mine timber requirements became the main source of employment about Lynchford. During 1899 an additional siding was installed at the railway to accommodate the increasing timber harvesting activities.<sup>110</sup> Improved postal services were sought and gained but the request for the establishment of a police presence to deal with “the roughs” was not forthcoming for the 200 hundred residents.<sup>111</sup> Lynchford was formally proclaimed on 4 April 1901,<sup>112</sup> the rates roll comprising one hotel, two shops, a house, twenty-five cottages and one hut.<sup>113</sup> The ongoing transformation of Lynchford, from a mining centre to that of a timber and rural district, was accelerated with the January 1902 completion of the three mile road link to Queenstown. The following year the small farms about Lynchford produced much of the milk supply for the Lyell district.<sup>114</sup>

The population increase in 1900 saw pressure brought to bear on the Education Department to improve school facilities. The number of school age children increased from twenty-four to thirty. It was argued that ‘the children of the Mount Lyell Co’s. spreading wood depot receive justice.’<sup>115</sup> The following year tenders were called for the new Lynchford State School.<sup>116</sup> As the timber became scarce about Howard’s Plains through 1907, the Mount Lyell Company concentrated on the Lynchford and Hall’s

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<sup>107</sup> *Mercury*, 9 July 1932.

<sup>108</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 21 September 1897, pp. 1578-79.

<sup>109</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 October 1897.

<sup>110</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC) Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-year ending 30 September 1899, pp. 22 & 29, Queenstown.

<sup>111</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 September 1899.

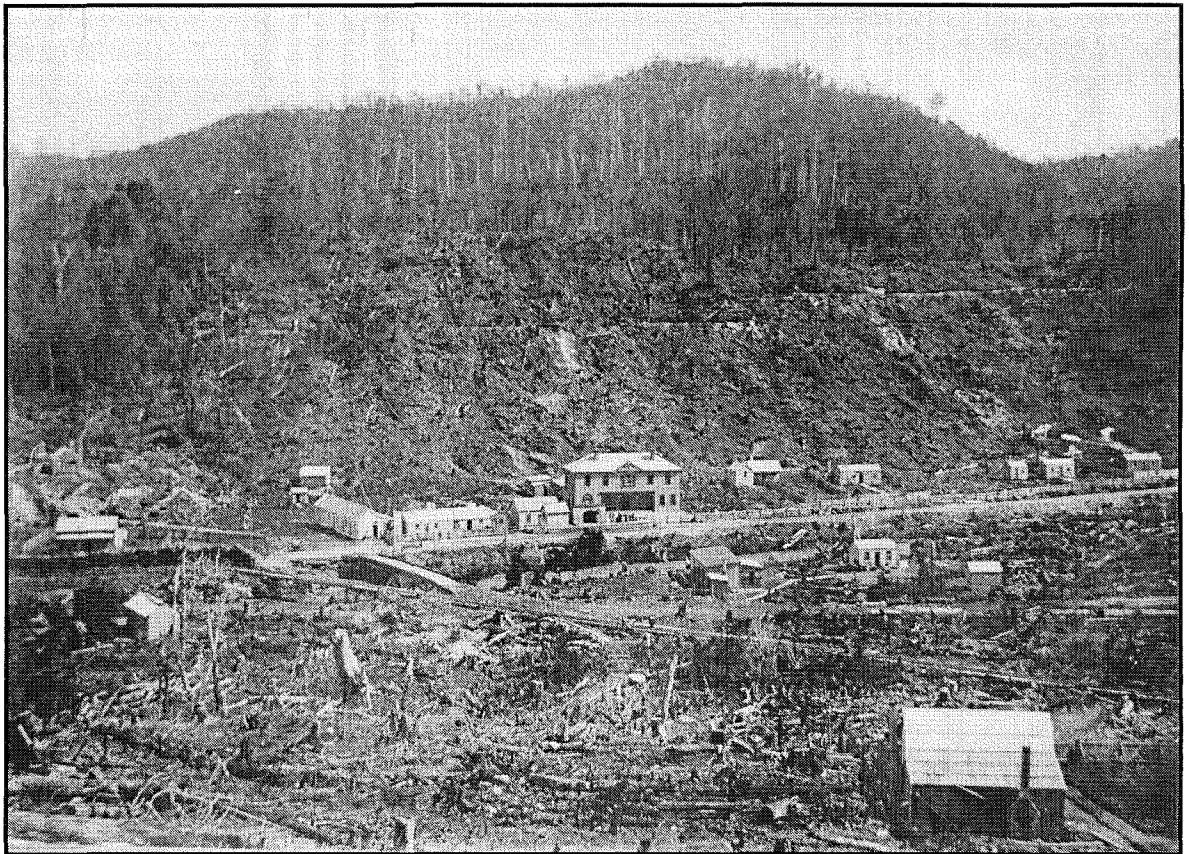
<sup>112</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1901, p. 925.

<sup>113</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 19 March 1901, p. 776.

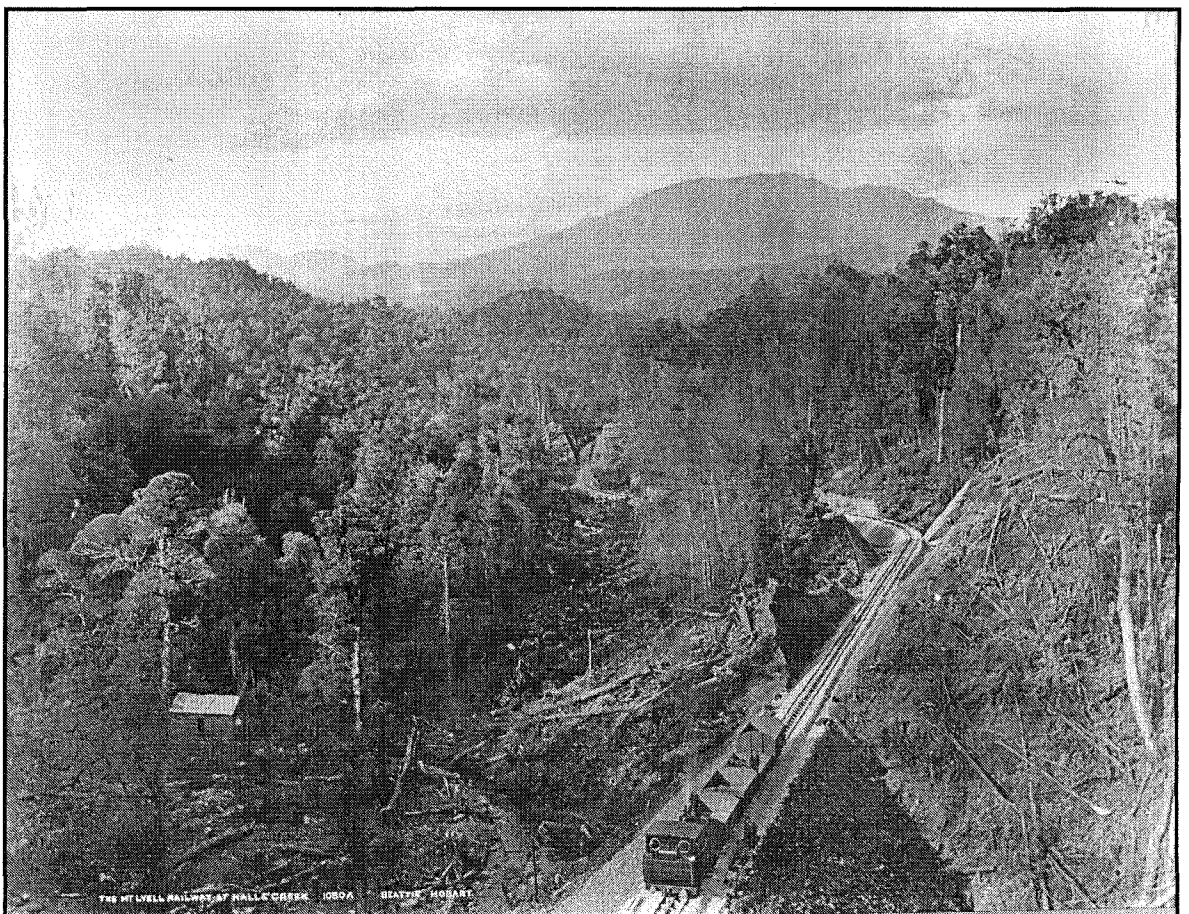
<sup>114</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 June 1903.

<sup>115</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 September 1900.

<sup>116</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 3 September 1901, p. 1560.



**LYNCHFORD HOTEL AND RAILWAY – c. 1904**



**HALLS CREEK AND NEWLY BUILT 1 in 16 GRADE ABT RAILWAY**

Creek areas for its supplies. Tramways, wooden flumes and chutes were hastily constructed to facilitate the cartage of the timber billets to the railway line.<sup>117</sup> The pressure on wood stocks about the district was considerable, the Company requiring 120,000 tons of wood annually to feed its various operations.<sup>118</sup> Lynchford became the centre of the Company's woodcutting activities, Blainey describing the scene from the train:

Railway passengers who passed through the little town at nightfall saw a hundred or more cutters, axe in hand, returning to their huts and tents, and saw the curving wooden flumes in which a swift flow of water carried timber down the gullies to high wood stacks beside the railway. Alongside the railway station stood a delicensed bush shanty [Queen River Hotel] and the two-storied Railway Hotel [moved from Teepookana in 1899], where the woodcutters made merry far into the night.<sup>119</sup>

By 1914 most of the wood had been cut out in the Lynchford district, forcing the Company to move its activities to the Lake Margaret and Lyell Comstock areas. Lynchford returned to the doldrums, the 1925 rates roll showing eighteen buildings and the railway station.<sup>120</sup> Whitham describes the scene, 'the place is now deserted, except for a dairyman and the men who work on the railway. There is a large area of good grazing land in the neighbourhood, the soil being derived from the decomposition of the igneous porphyroid rocks.'<sup>121</sup> Unlike the valley towns, life and weather conditions were extremely different in the mining towns scattered about Mount Lyell.

### **Mount Lyell Mining Communities**

The four mining settlements depended on the Mount Lyell Company for survival. Unfortunately for North Lyell and Linda, the Company tolerated their existence to lesser degrees, which eventually saw Gormanston become the permanent mining town for the district. This section briefly outlines the histories of the towns and the Company's domination of their futures. It also discusses the two smaller settlements of Lyell Comstock and Lake Margaret, which were located in isolated valleys to the north of Mount Lyell.

Anxious to avoid the pitfalls of inappropriate residential development near the Iron Blow mine, the government commissioned a survey, which commenced by July

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<sup>117</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 2 April 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/322, pp. 765A-766, AOT.

<sup>118</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 21 April 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/323, pp. 933-935, AOT.

<sup>119</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 232.

<sup>120</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 11 June 1925, pp. 1172-1173.

<sup>121</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*, p. 68.

1893, to mark-out a suitable town site.<sup>122</sup> The area chosen was located on a bare button-grass plain, just less than a mile to the south east of the Iron Blow. It was well drained and offered ample supplies of fresh water. The final survey plan, comprising 129 lots, was compiled and drawn in November the same year.<sup>123</sup> The town was proclaimed “Gormanston” on 4 November 1893, being named in honour of the Governor, the Right Honorable Jenicho William Joseph, Viscount Gormanston.<sup>124</sup>

The first land sale was set down for 21 February 1894 at Strahan. This gave the locals a greater opportunity to obtain a block and lessened the extent to which speculators could ‘simply purchase for gambling purposes, and not for legitimate business areas or residences.’<sup>125</sup> The site chosen for Gormanston was criticised. The local newspaper correspondent considered the township to be too far from the Iron Blow, ensuring that it would not be populated ‘till the railway is made and a thousand men are employed on the Lyell and adjoining mines.’<sup>126</sup> Contrary to local opinion, the auction proved most successful with 72 of the 113 lots on offer being sold. A total of £2,700 was raised, with a high price of £90 achieved and an average figure of nearly £40 per lot, well above the £20 reserve figure.<sup>127</sup> Unlike Queenstown, the development of Gormanston proceeded hastily, with two butcheries, two bakeries, two hotels, two stores and a shoemaker being established by June the same year.<sup>128</sup>

Located half a mile from the Iron Blow and four to five miles by dray road from Queenstown, Gormanston was the major “mining town” for the Mount Lyell area. The opening of a branch office of the National Bank in early December 1894 provided a much-needed boon to residents and business community.<sup>129</sup> A permanent police presence was established during 1894 and a post office with banking facilities in January the following year.<sup>130</sup> As the town expanded so did the need for roads, water and sanitary services. A progress committee was elected in late November 1895, its substantive role being to coordinate and improve living conditions in the settlement.<sup>131</sup> During the early months of 1896 the Mount Lyell Company expanded its Iron Blow operations in readiness for smelting. The move to full time mining saw a marked

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<sup>122</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 July 1893.

<sup>123</sup> JPPP, Survey Department: Annual Report of the Deputy Surveyor-General, 1894, paper 80, p. 7. Map Reference Gormanston 1, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.

<sup>124</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 7 November 1893, p. 2135.

<sup>125</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 February 1894.

<sup>126</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 February 1894.

<sup>127</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1894.

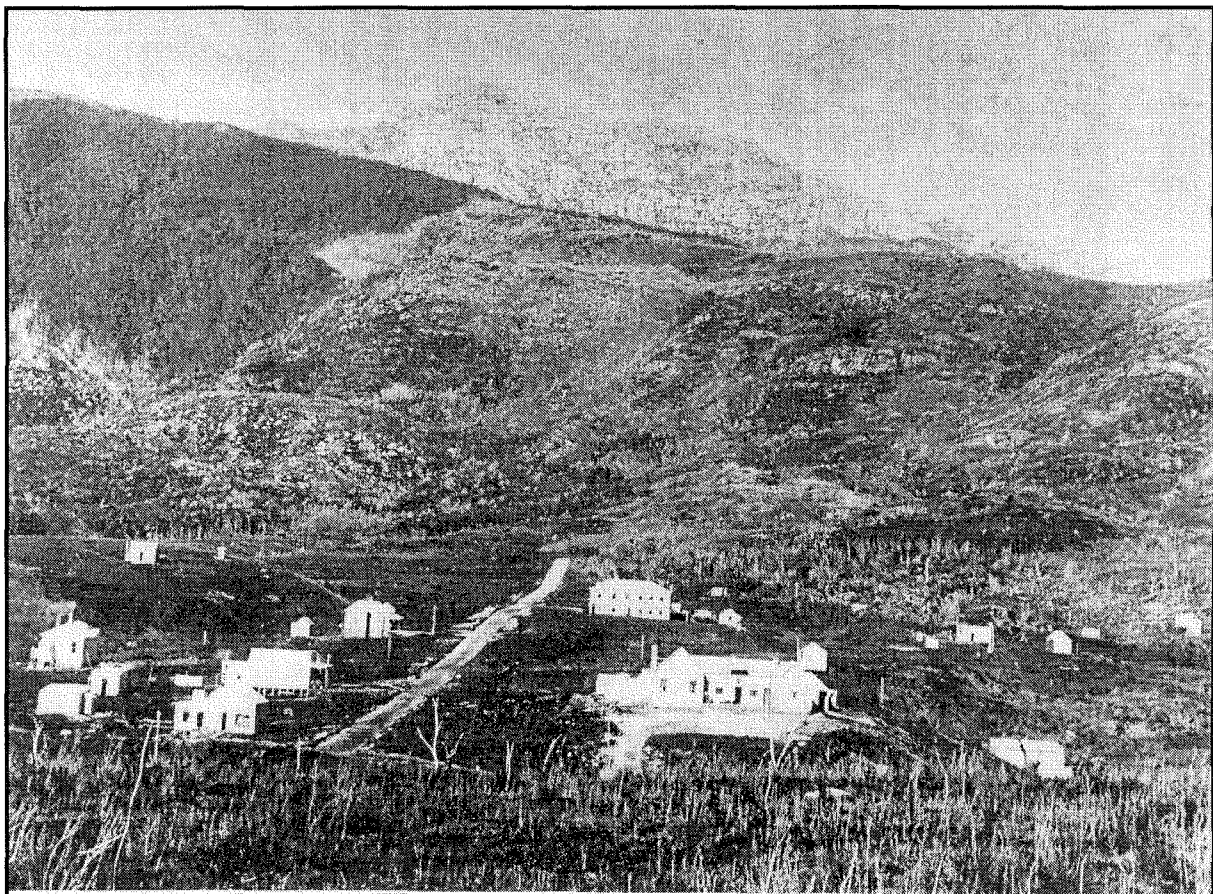
<sup>128</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 June 1894.

<sup>129</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 4 December 1894.

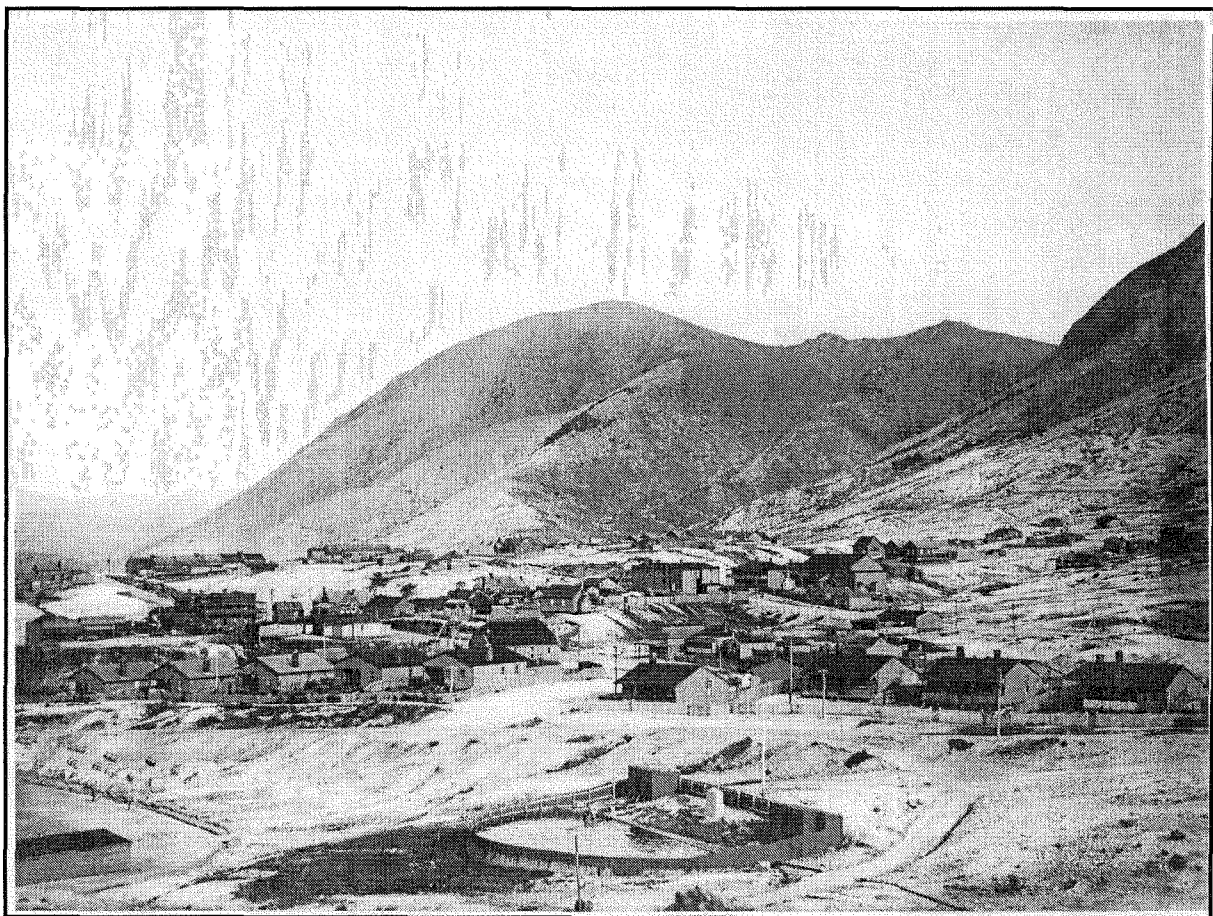
<sup>130</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 12 February 1895, p. 479.

<sup>131</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 December 1895.





**PETERS STREET, GORMANSTON – c. 1895**



**GORMANSTON – c. 1925**

increase in the number of substantial residences built in Gormanston, the new structures replacing the temporary tents that struggled to withstand the onslaught of the strong winds that prevailed in the exposed conditions.<sup>132</sup>

Over the following twelve months the town's amenities continued to improve. By April 1898 a state school, police station and a Catholic Church had been built.<sup>133</sup> Other public works included the formation of several new streets and the erection of a meeting hall.<sup>134</sup> With the completion of the Abt Railway into Queenstown, and the subsequent upgrading of the road between the two towns, transport and mail services to Gormanston improved markedly. Being located downwind from the Company's smelters, Gormanston bore the full brunt of the sulphur emissions from the smelters. The toxic clouds corroded the galvanised iron roofs and walls of many buildings in the town.<sup>135</sup>

Gormanston suffered as the poor relation to Queenstown, which received much of the public money allocated to the region. Claims of government neglect and pro Queenstown favouritism became a common catch cry for Gormanston's residents and its business community.<sup>136</sup> Health measures in the expanding town improved with the 26 November 1898 appointment of an Inspector for the Health District of Gormanston,<sup>137</sup> following the 28 October certification of the Gormanston Local Board of Health By-Laws.<sup>138</sup> Seeking greater autonomy for the district, the townspeople petitioned government to form a Town Board. Under a board's jurisdiction it would be possible to claim a subsidy for half the receipts from the land sales within the town, as had occurred in Queenstown.<sup>139</sup> The petition was successful, the proclamation of the expanded town boundaries occurring on 6 January 1899, and the election set for 4 February.<sup>140</sup> The prospects for Gormanston were bright. Building activity had boomed in the town, spurred on by the expansion of local mining activities of the Mount Lyell and the recently formed North Mount Lyell Copper Companies. The construction of the latter Company's railway, between Kelly Basin and the Linda Valley, also promised to open up the Mounts Jukes and Darwin mineral fields. Considerable business and work opportunities were likely for the Gormanston community. It was considered at the time

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<sup>132</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 April 1896.

<sup>133</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1898.

<sup>134</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 18 June 1898.

<sup>135</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 April 1896.

<sup>136</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 October 1898.

<sup>137</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 29 November 1898, p. 2137.

<sup>138</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 1 November 1898, pp. 2031-2035.

<sup>139</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 October 1898.

<sup>140</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 10 January 1899, p. 37.

‘the pioneer town of the Mount Lyell mineral field will, at no distant date, pick up the leeway and rival her sister town (Queenstown) in the march of general advancement.’<sup>141</sup>

The new Board faced many challenges, including water supply and sanitation services, the formation of town streets, the provision of street lighting and the improvement of general communications. Under the leadership of its inaugural Chairman, PE Kaepfel, the Board improved the town’s living standards and resolved to extend its area of jurisdiction over the newly-developing town of Linda, located at the head of the Linda Valley.<sup>142</sup> New boundaries for the Town of Gormanston were duly proclaimed on 16 March 1900.<sup>143</sup> The Linda Valley Progress Committee vigorously opposed this action. The Gormanston Town Board defended the land grab, claiming the towns were so close that only a single board was justified. The *Mount Lyell Standard* observed that once the North Mount Lyell railway had been built into Gormanston, a narrow gauge connecting line could then be extended to link all the mines, reducing the relevance of Linda and making Gormanston the base for the mines in the area.<sup>144</sup>

In March 1901 the combined population of Gormanston and Lyell was 1,760. Gormanston’s future as an important commercial centre for the region was assured. New buildings included a modern cordial factory,<sup>145</sup> a Post and Telegraph office<sup>146</sup> and a substantial Wesleyan Church, that included meeting rooms and a high bell tower.<sup>147</sup> Seven hotels catered for the heavy thirst of the miners and provided accommodation for the large numbers of visitors to the area.<sup>148</sup> The town attracted a significant number of shops and ancillary services, their interests being advanced by the formation of the Lyell Chamber of Commerce.<sup>149</sup>

Communications to Gormanston promised to improve significantly. The soon to be completed railway from Kelly Basin would provide a far cheaper and more efficient option than the existing railway trip from Strahan to Queenstown and the dray trip up the hill to Gormanston. Construction of a railway between Gormanston and the Lyell Comstock mine, located on the northern side of Mount Lyell, was expected to commence soon. Ambitious proposals to extend both the Emu Bay line and build the Great Western Railway provided further impetus to the district. Town amenities were

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<sup>141</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 February 1899.

<sup>142</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 April 1899.

<sup>143</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 20 March 1900, p. 388.

<sup>144</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 April 1900.

<sup>145</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 November 1900.

<sup>146</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 November 1900.

<sup>147</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 May 1901.

<sup>148</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 20 November 1900.

<sup>149</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 24 December 1900.

improved. The water supply was upgraded<sup>150</sup> and the Mount Lyell Mine Medical Union completed the much-needed casualty ward, helped by a donation from the Mount Lyell Company.<sup>151</sup>

Although the North Mount Lyell railway commenced operations into Linda on 14 December 1900, construction of the two and a quarter mile branch line into Gormanston was delayed. The costly line was opened to general traffic on 7 October 1901 following the inaugural trip by a party of local identities and politicians the day before.<sup>152</sup> Much of the community's frustration stemming from the mismanagement of the North Mount Lyell operations has been previously discussed in Chapters 2 (mining) and 5 (railways). Upon the 22 May 1903 takeover of the North Mount Lyell assets by the Mount Lyell Company, the region was thrown into temporary chaos. The editor of the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* advised those living in the Lyell district to 'let the immediate future be looked to, and there will be found a rent in the cloud auguring a return to bright sunshiny days of prosperity – not the wild hilarious days of boomtime, but of steady progress and sound trade.'<sup>153</sup>

Gormanston and Linda did not unduly suffer from the amalgamation of the two companies, unlike the settlements of Crotty, Darwin and Pillinger. However, early promises of rail connections to Lyell Comstock, Hobart and Emu Bay never eventuated. The branchline into Gormanston was closed on 7 September 1903. Population numbers fluctuated, with many displaced workers relocating their huts and houses to Gormanston and Linda, in the hope of gaining work in the mines. Gormanston's population would eventually suffer as it was distant from the mines and did not possess the superior amenities or cheaper living of Queenstown. It temporarily waned, with some 240 to 250 miners preferring to live in Queenstown.<sup>154</sup> Gormanston lacked street lighting and entertainment venues. The *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* noted that women found the stark solitude of the Gormanston way of life very difficult. Each weekend the town's single folk gravitated towards the brighter environment of Queenstown.<sup>155</sup>

For a while Gormanston did not enjoy the same level of assistance from the Mount Lyell Company compared to Queenstown. Sticht had little empathy for the North Mount Lyell unionist miners living in the mining towns and he was cognisant of

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<sup>150</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 May 1901.

<sup>151</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 3 April 1901, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/316, pp. 863–864, AOT.

<sup>152</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 7 October 1901.

<sup>153</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 26 May 1903.

<sup>154</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 October 1904.

<sup>155</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 16 July 1906.



their general opposition towards the Company.<sup>156</sup> The Gormanston Town Board had incurred Sticht's wrath when in early 1907 it placed unreasonably high rates on a number of the Company's properties, drawing him to comment:

On the whole our policy towards the local townships has been very liberal right along, as we recognise the necessity of assisting them to get an adequate revenue from the only source that they have. However, in the case of Gormanston, the spirit shown has been, as might have been expected, inimical to the Company – hence our resistance.<sup>157</sup>

The 20 August 1907 proclamation of the Gormanston municipality and its three wards of Linda, Owen and Lyell, provided new opportunities in the district, although there was much work to be done. The poll was held 19 December 1907 and the Council held its first meeting on 6 January 1908.<sup>158</sup>

Gormanston was not perceived as an attractive place to live or visit. The Western Tasmanian Tourist Association described the Gormanston scenery as somewhat weird. Its 'gaunt, rugged hills, and deep gullies once verdant with forest and fern are now utterly destitute of vegetation, the continuous deluge of sulphur and arsenic from the Mt. Lyell Reduction Works being fatal to all plant life.'<sup>159</sup> Little could be done to improve this perspective. A decade later a visitor returning to the area, after nearly thirty years absence, likened the once veritable fairy's dell to that of a devastated battlefield in northern France.<sup>160</sup> Blainey acknowledges the Linda Valley did have a certain beauty, albeit at night time when from the main street of Gormanston the view of several hundred flickering lanterns held by miners walking down from the northern mines produced an unforgettable sight.<sup>161</sup>

The miners' strikes of 1911 and 1912, closely followed by the 12 October 1912 fire at the North Lyell mine, appeared to have severely damaged the futures of Lyell towns, as miners and families departed the district in droves. Faced with the problems of both retaining and attracting experienced miners to the field, the Mount Lyell Company became more sympathetic towards improving the standard of living for the men and their families in Gormanston, North Lyell and Linda. More affordable accommodation was considered.<sup>162</sup> Russell Murray recommended that immediate steps

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<sup>156</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 24 February 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/320, pp. 640-641, AOT.

<sup>157</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 8 January 1907, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/322, p. 560, AOT.

<sup>158</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 8 January 1908.

<sup>159</sup> Judd, *Pictorial Guide to the West Coast of Tasmania*, p. 118.

<sup>160</sup> P Crawford, *King – The story of a river*, Hobart, Montpelier Press, 2000, p. 66.

<sup>161</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 186.

<sup>162</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 April 1912, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/327, p. 845, AOT.

be taken to improve housing and boarding accommodation in Gormanston and Linda. In particular, Murray considered Gormanston to be more suited as the town was located on higher ground and decidedly more healthy. There were also many untenanted houses that could be secured cheaply and ample vacant allotments on which to build.<sup>163</sup>

The Company adopted Murray's ideas, even though 'it was a radical departure from the policy of his own directors.'<sup>164</sup> By December 1913 the Company had purchased and renovated eighteen cottages at Gormanston. Murray considered importing kit form houses from Risby Brothers in Hobart and he investigated building houses entirely from concrete.<sup>165</sup> The housing plan proved an immediate success with Murray reporting that the arrival of men and their wives in Gormanston was a daily occurrence and 'the men who have gone into the houses seem to have settled down in the district to a much greater extent than the average employee.'<sup>166</sup> Following the outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914 the Company cutback its capital expenditure programs. The new housing scheme was deferred and the erection of an innovative, all-concrete, experimental house was placed on hold.<sup>167</sup>

Ongoing army enlistment led to a further shortage of miners, and saw the Company secure replacements from Melbourne. Needing suitable accommodation for the new arrivals, the Company recommenced its real estate acquisition program. Apart from purchasing several vacant lots, the Company secured the thirty-seven roomed Gormanston Hotel for £2,000, in May 1916, for conversion into a boarding house.<sup>168</sup> The following year the Board approved the erection of twelve new houses in the town.<sup>169</sup> The Company's activities led to a minor revival in Gormanston, the population increasing by seventy. The town took on an improved appearance.<sup>170</sup> The Company's foray into the butchery and retail market, in competition with the local shopkeepers, reduced the costs of basic items. The broader issues of the Company's social welfare reform packages have been discussed in the previous chapter. With the Company now

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<sup>163</sup> R Murray, letter to General Manager, 3 April 1913, Correspondence - Railway Department Miscellaneous, NS 726/5, pp. 1-11, AOT.

<sup>164</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 234.

<sup>165</sup> R Murray, letter to Local Superintendent, 17 December 1913, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/254, pp. 135-137, AOT.

<sup>166</sup> R Murray, letter to Local Superintendent, 19 February 1914, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/254, p. 196, AOT.

<sup>167</sup> B Sawyer letter to Company Secretary, 18 August 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, pp. 472-475, AOT.

<sup>168</sup> R Murray, letter to General Manager, 31 May 1916, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/255, p. 128, AOT.

<sup>169</sup> B Sawyer letter to Company Secretary, 14 December 1917, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/334, p. 732, AOT.

<sup>170</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 January 1918.

intent on establishing Gormanston as the main residential centre for its miners, its medium term future was assured.<sup>171</sup>

The general softening of the hostilities between the miners and the Company was greatly assisted by Russell Murray. In his role as Engineer-in-Charge of the mines, and living at Gormanston, he demonstrated a fair approach to his men. His early years at the helm were not easy. Murray led from the front. His heroic acts of bravery during the North Lyell fire, combined with his strong empathy towards the men and a realisation of the need to improve their living conditions, gradually won favour. The Company's decision to continue its operations following the outbreak of war had averted a calamity for the whole of the Lyell District. The Gormanston Council recognised this fact and expressed its very warm appreciation on behalf of the community to Murray and the Company's directors. No mention was made of Robert Sticht.<sup>172</sup>

Both parties benefited from the improved relationship, the Council through the collection of increased rates and assistance to improve facilities, the Company with a committed and more contented workforce. Murray pushed for the supply of street and residential lighting, advising his Company that it was in line with its welfare guidelines and without it Gormanston would be 'much more uncongenial and cheerless than it otherwise would be.'<sup>173</sup> Sanctioned by the *Gormanston Municipal Lighting and Power Act 1917*, work on installing electric lighting to Gormanston was well progressed by April 1918, with the extension to Linda to commence soon after.<sup>174</sup> Murray's high standing in the community was recognised when upon his first time election as a councillor on the Gormanston Council in April 1920, he was elected Warden.<sup>175</sup> Gormanston prospered under the Company's strong influence and it took on a spick and span appearance. Residents now grew flowers and vegetables, 'rain, hail, wind and sulphur notwithstanding.'<sup>176</sup> Whitham noted in 1923 that there now existed patches of green within the Linda Valley, which was 'walled in by the pink and grey bastions of the mountains.'<sup>177</sup>

Gormanston enjoyed fair prosperity throughout the 1920s, with 'an amount of "free cash" in circulation which would make the mouth of many a trader in other parts

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<sup>171</sup> B Sawyer letter to Company Secretary, 27 September 1918, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/335, pp. 611-612, AOT.

<sup>172</sup> JC O'Brien, letter to RM Murray, 1 October 1914, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/330, p. 619, AOT.

<sup>173</sup> R Murray, letter to Local Superintendent, 7 August 1917, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/255, pp. 465-468, AOT.

<sup>174</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 April 1918.

<sup>175</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 May 1920.

<sup>176</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 March 1920.

<sup>177</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*, p. 68.

of the State, water with envy.'<sup>178</sup> In 1926 Gormanston's population was 770,<sup>179</sup> increasing to 1210 in 1935, following the introduction of large-scale mining operations.<sup>180</sup> The 1932 opening of the road through to Hobart further contributed to the town's prospects, by which time the Company owned over one hundred houses, several shops, a boarding house, a public hall, club houses and numerous community facilities in the town.<sup>181</sup>

The second largest mining town about Mount Lyell was Linda, located in the valley immediately below Gormanston. The early huts along the Linda Creek were of very basic paling construction and had been occupied by gold miners. The 20 October 1897 discovery of rich copper deposits on the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's lease, located on the southern slopes of Mount Lyell, less than a mile away, triggered a growth spurt for Linda. Miners and railway navvies populated the area, Linda being the terminus of the North Mount Lyell Company's railway to Kelly Basin. In January 1900 the Linda Progress Committee was formed, its early role being to construct roads and provide services.<sup>182</sup> As Gormanston was dominated by Queenstown, so did Gormanston overshadow Linda. In April 1900 the newly-formed Committee unsuccessfully attempted to thwart the inclusion of the town within the new Gormanston town boundary, arguing that Linda would lose its identity and suffer when it came to funding improvements.<sup>183</sup>

The second half of 1900 proved a busy time for Linda. The first auction of town land, comprising 178 lots, was held on 25 July 1900.<sup>184</sup> The sale proved very successful. The highest price paid was £265 and the lowest £15, the minimum reserve figure.<sup>185</sup> The sale did not pass without drama. At the time of the sale some thirty-eight structures had been illegally built on lots, leading to claims that people had been intimidated from bidding for these lots, effectively enabling the squatters to obtain the land at the reserve prices. The Minister of Lands acknowledged the practice and advised that future auctions would be held elsewhere to prevent a repeat action.<sup>186</sup> Following the sale, Gormanston's population and building activity increased. Some

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<sup>178</sup> *Advocate*, 13 March 1926.

<sup>179</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1926-27, 1929, paper 50.

<sup>180</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1935-36, 1937, paper 48, p. 19.

<sup>181</sup> Report by RM Murray, 1 April 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/353, pp. 128-131, AOT.

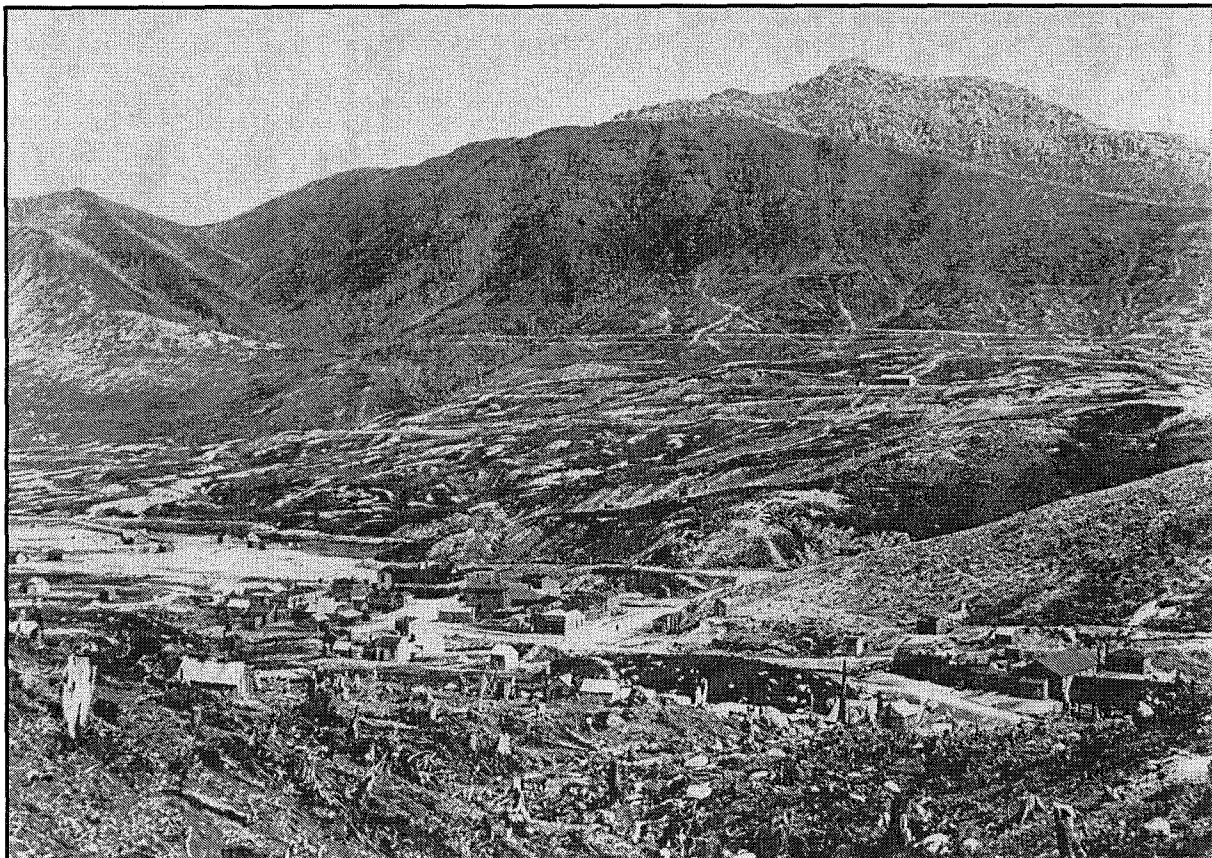
<sup>182</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 January 1900.

<sup>183</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 4 April 1900.

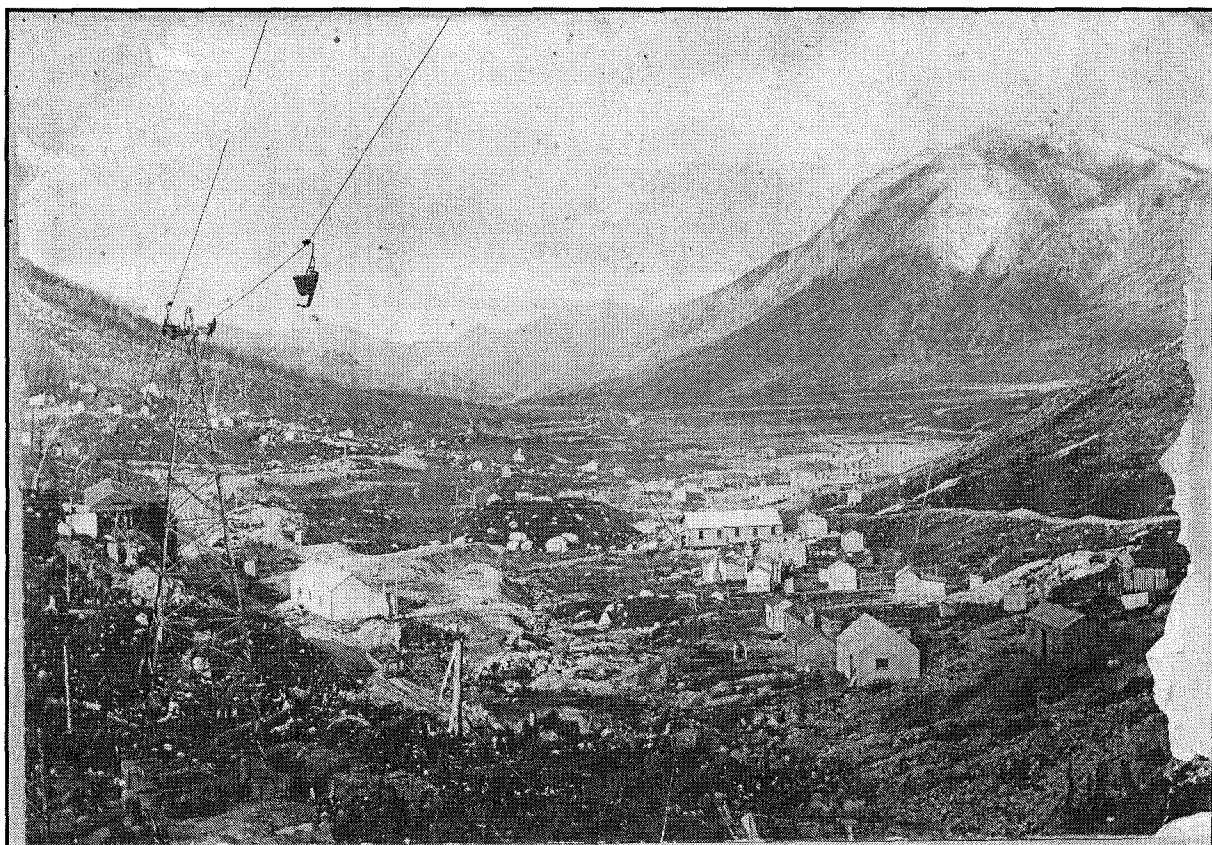
<sup>184</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 26 June 1900, pp. 1027-1029.

<sup>185</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 July 1900.

<sup>186</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 August 1900.



LINDA TOWNSHIP – c. 1904



LINDA TOWN AND RAILWAY STATION - 1901

amenities were lacking, there being no post office or a school for the forty-five school-age children.<sup>187</sup>

The completion of the railway through to Linda in early September 1900 further enlivened the town. On 24 September operations commenced for the transport of ore to Kelly Basin for export overseas. This was an interim measure until the smelters at Crotty were completed and brought into operation. By October 1900 there were two hotels, five stores and two barbers' shops.<sup>188</sup> Linda's population grew to 600 by the end of the year, with many of the men employed at the mines, on the railway, or engaged in wood cutting.<sup>189</sup> An air of expectation and confidence pervaded. Its sheltered disposition and proximity to the mines made it advantageous to live in Linda. There was a belief that the settlement would become the dominant town in the district.<sup>190</sup>

Towards the end of 1900 the town's communications were upgraded to include postal facilities,<sup>191</sup> telegraphic connection,<sup>192</sup> and a telephone station.<sup>193</sup> Road access to the town was improved during 1901, with works completed on the Gormanston and King River roads. A direct link was established with the town of North Lyell in early January 1902. Following the implementation of the stage coach service between Queenstown, Gormanston and Linda in July 1901, Linda residents enjoyed the choice of travelling by rail to Kelly Basin or via the Mount Lyell Company's railway to Strahan and beyond on the line to Zeehan.<sup>194</sup> Public buildings erected about this time included a new police station in May 1901,<sup>195</sup> and the school, which was completed in time for the 1902 school year.<sup>196</sup>

Linda benefited from the amalgamation of Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Companies as the demand for land increased. Several new shops were built and a number of houses were relocated to Linda, having been dismantled and removed from the dormant towns along the North Lyell railway. Linda had entered a new stage of growth and prosperity.<sup>197</sup> The town acquired the reputation of being livelier and more rowdy than Gormanston, and it 'looked on its more respectable rival with scorn.'<sup>198</sup> Of the 168 men employed at the Lyell Blocks mine, most lived at Linda. The major

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<sup>187</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 1 October 1900.

<sup>188</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 October 1900.

<sup>189</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 November 1900.

<sup>190</sup> *Banner*, 12 September 1900.

<sup>191</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 January 1900.

<sup>192</sup> JPPP, Post and Telegraph Department: Report for 1900, 1901, paper 12, p. 5.

<sup>193</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 30 October 1900, p. 1754.

<sup>194</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 July 1901.

<sup>195</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 6 June 1901.

<sup>196</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 5 February 1902.

<sup>197</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 19 June 1903.

employer on the Field, the Mount Lyell Company, had 276 men working at the Iron Blow and 451 at the North Lyell mine. Of these men, 175 resided at North Lyell, 227 at Linda, 105 at Queenstown and 220 at Gormanston.<sup>199</sup> Linda continued to grow as activity about the mines expanded. By 1907 it had assumed a general air of stability and prosperity,<sup>200</sup> and had three licensed premises.<sup>201</sup>

Despite being within the confines of the Linda Valley, the town was still ravaged by the sulphur fumes and lashed by the prevailing winds and storms. Linda's stark setting drew King O'Malley, the region's local member in Federal Parliament, to comment: 'If I had two properties, and one was in Linda and one was in Hell and I decided to live in one, it wouldn't be Linda.'<sup>202</sup> The town was low lying and poorly drained. Two large creeks (the Idaho and Linda) flowed through Linda, their contents swollen by mine drainage and waste from the town.<sup>203</sup> Apart from the major mines, there were a number of smaller diggings nearby that polluted the creeks. On the Linda Creek, Patsy Crawford comments:

The creek flows through what was the boom town of Linda and carried along its course tailings and effluent from the immensely rich mines of North Lyell. When the mines were going flat out, the Linda Creek must have battled its way to the King [River] like a moving sludge of pea soup.<sup>204</sup>

Murray was far from impressed with Linda. Some time after the Company's decision to acquire and renovate houses for the miners, only five had been in Linda. Justifying his reasons, Murray considered: 'Linda is not a suitable place in which to settle workmen, as it is badly situated from a health point of view, and is generally regarded as undesirable for residence on account of its occupation by the roughest class of the population.'<sup>205</sup> Murray's preference to develop Gormanston as the main residential town for its miners did not prevent the Company from spending money at Linda for the wellbeing of the population. The Company contributed to the revamping of the Commonwealth Hall for use by the Lyell Pastime Club and sought to supply electric lighting for residences during 1919, the work being delayed for the want of materials.<sup>206</sup> In July 1920 Murray received a deputation of residents from Linda requesting assistance with a number of housing and other projects, in the hope that

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<sup>198</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 185.

<sup>199</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 November 1904.

<sup>200</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 February 1906.

<sup>201</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 15 January 1907, p. 135.

<sup>202</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 186.

<sup>203</sup> EJ Wedd, *Linda – Ghost Town of Mt. Lyell*, Queenstown, EJ Wedd, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>204</sup> Crawford, *King – The story of a river*, p. 72.

<sup>205</sup> R Murray, letter to Local Superintendent, 17 December 1913, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/254, pp. 135-136, AOT.

<sup>206</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 14 February 1919.



works would halt the slow deterioration of the town. Although it was the Company's policy to relocate its Linda employees to Gormanston, Murray recommended that the Company subsidise the cost of materials to enable the Linda homeowners to sustain their buildings.<sup>207</sup> The gradual decline in Linda's population, as contrived by the Mount Lyell Company, saw shops close and some services withdrawn, although Murray did reinstate the visits by the doctor and reopened the dispensary for two days a week.<sup>208</sup>

The austerity measures introduced by the Company in the early 1920s, as outlined in Chapter 2, hit Linda hard. Many unemployed miners left the region in search of jobs. The progressive closure of the North Mount Lyell railway in 1924 and 1928 contributed to reduced activity around Linda, as did the 4 September 1928 opening of the underground tunnel between the smelters and the North Lyell mine. With workers now transported underground to and from work, the advantages of living close to the mine at Linda had evaporated. Miners and their families sought the superior amenities at Gormanston and Queenstown. Former resident Rocky Wedd recounts that 'Linda was declining rapidly. The newsagent and barber's shop closed as well as several shops. The bakery had closed earlier. Later one of the existing hotels was burnt down... Linda was depending on Gormanston for its final existence.'<sup>209</sup> By 1931 the social hall and butchery had closed.<sup>210</sup> Two years later Murray reported that the Company had no direct interest in the Linda settlement, which was 'practically abandoned as a residential area.'<sup>211</sup>

The third mining town, North Lyell, did not enjoy the support of the Mount Lyell Company. Located on Philosopher's Ridge, less than a mile to the north west of Linda, and approximately two miles to the north of Gormanston, North Lyell began as a scattered group of miners huts close to the Lyell Tharsis and North Mount Lyell mines. The small isolated settlement lacked vital services, its growth not regulated by a town board or health authority. The 20 October 1897 discovery of the rich copper ore at the North Mount Lyell mine produced a further influx of miners and considerable building activity along the ridge. Within six months two stores, a butcher's shop and three boarding houses were erected to service the growing settlement.<sup>212</sup> To legitimise their

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<sup>207</sup> R Murray, letter to C Triffett, Linda, 22 July 1920, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/256, pp. 513-515, AOT.

<sup>208</sup> R Murray, letter to General Manager, 13 July 1920, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/256, pp. 501-504, AOT.

<sup>209</sup> Wedd, *Linda – Ghost Town of Mt. Lyell*, p. 90.

<sup>210</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 21 April 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/353, p. 126, AOT.

<sup>211</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 8 August 1933, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/355, p. 273, AOT.

<sup>212</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 30 April 1898.



occupations and avoid a repetition of the problems with the squatters at Penghana and Queenstown, the North Lyell settlers called on the government to set aside the area for a township and have the land surveyed. The move to establish a formal township received strong local support and the tacit approval of the adjacent mining companies, conditional on their mining operations not being hindered.<sup>213</sup>

The government neither acceded to the request nor took action to prevent the occupation. The subsequent completion of the road between Gormanston and the North Lyell mine around August 1898 sparked a second wave of settlers and a further expansion of the township. New buildings included commercial premises, a substantial office and manager's residence at the Lyell Tharsis mine, and numerous huts about the surrounding steep hillsides.<sup>214</sup> A number of buildings faced safety problems, being close to blasting at the mines. Most lacked sanitary services. The stench from discarded household waste was offensive. Many local creeks and streams became polluted, putting residents at high risk of contracting typhoid.<sup>215</sup> Procrastination by government in dealing with the problem created uncertainty amongst residents and, consequently, little was spent on the buildings. Educational facilities were also lacking. In April 1899 the government was approached to provide a school for the estimated fifty to seventy-five children of school age.<sup>216</sup> Once again it failed to respond. The wisdom of the officials was queried. A hotel had been approved at the outset of the settlement and yet the growing community did not warrant a school.<sup>217</sup>

Living conditions at the exposed mountainside village were extremely difficult. Blainey describes them thus:

This town of North Lyell was inhabited by miners who built huts on the mining leases, near the smithies, stables and charcoal kilns of the mines. Hotel, stores, boarding house, iron and paling huts formed a straggling settlement which was threatened by bushfires every summer, was a snowfield in the depth of winter, and lay exposed to sulphur and wind the seasons round.<sup>218</sup>

The unabated increase in squatters about the Mount Lyell mining leases created a dilemma for Robert Sticht and the Mount Lyell Company. Not only did the occupations limit mining activities and hinder future expansion, they also presented a security risk. Having already experienced problems at Penghana, Sticht was keen to ensure squatters

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<sup>213</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1898.

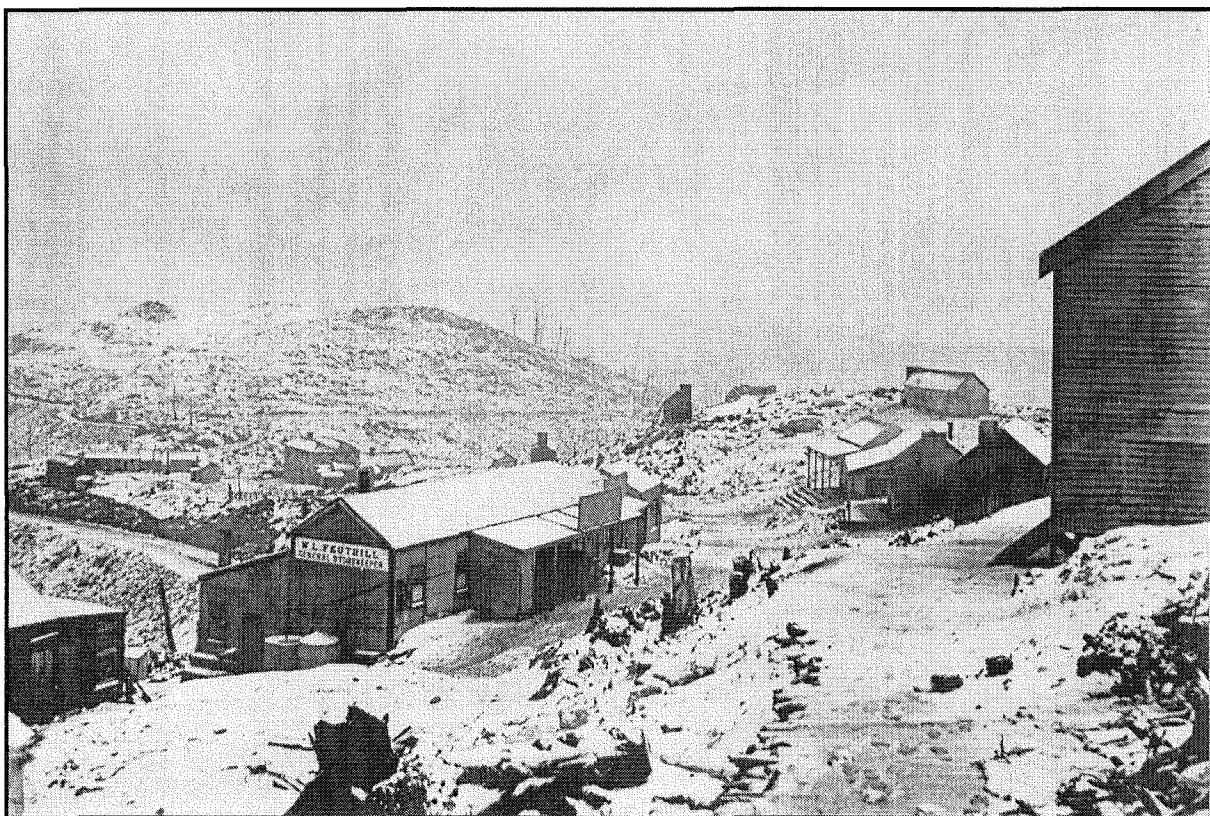
<sup>214</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 September 1898.

<sup>215</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 April 1899.

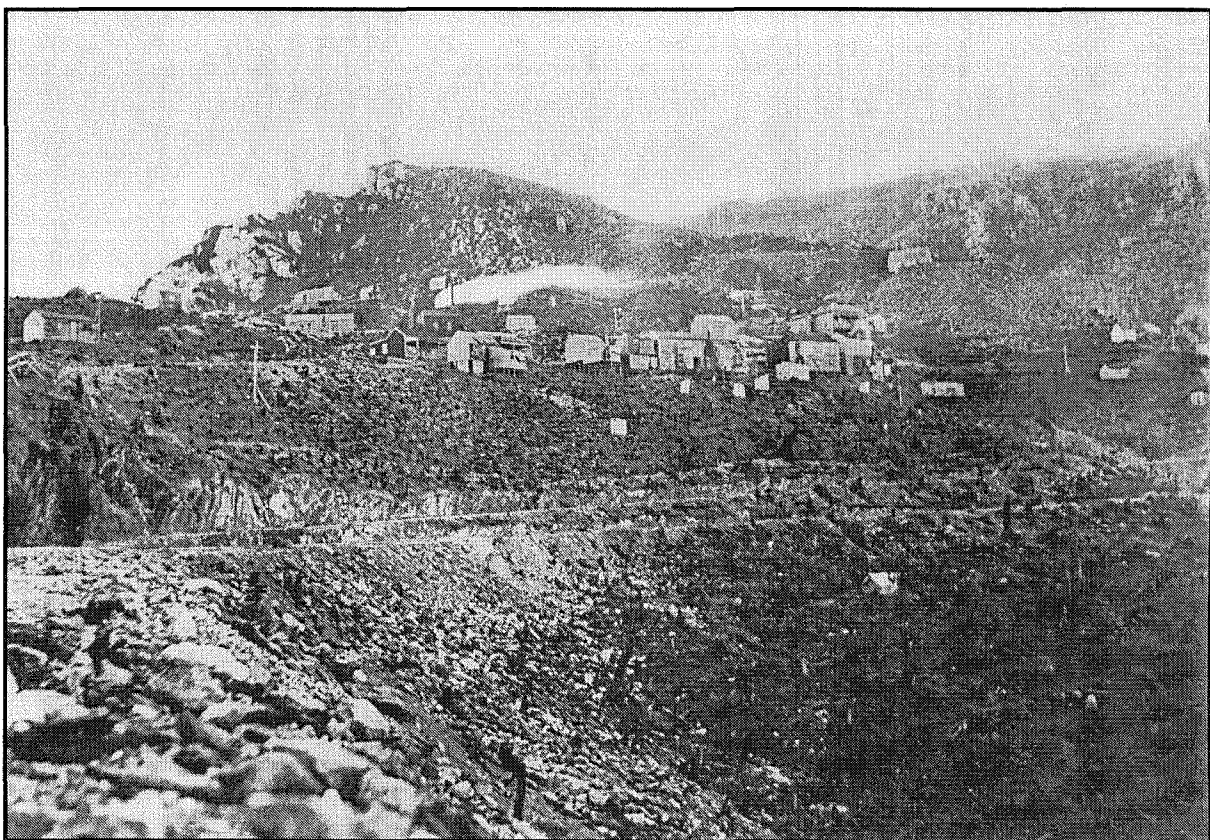
<sup>216</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 17 April 1899.

<sup>217</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 December 1899.

<sup>218</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 93.



TOWN OF NORTH LYELL IN SNOW – c. 1902



NORTH LYELL, LOOKING TOWARDS NORTH MOUNT LYELL MINE – c. 1900

on the Company's leases were moved on by the Bailiff.<sup>219</sup> Sticht would only permit limited occupation by employees on the Company's mining leases if they agreed in writing to move on when required. Public shops were not tolerated under any circumstance as they would form a nucleus for 'the springing up of numerous other huts around them.'<sup>220</sup> Sticht's anti-squatter stance was supported by Edward Mulcahy, the Minister for Lands. Visiting the North Lyell settlement in May 1900, he refused to sanction the construction of a school on the mining leases.<sup>221</sup> To gain strength through a combined approach against Mulcahy, the newly-formed North Lyell Progress Committee sought to join forces with the Conglomerate Creek and Kelly Basin squatters who had been threatened with eviction.<sup>222</sup> Many realised that the government was unlikely formally to approve the North Lyell township but occupation of the area may, at best, be recognised by the granting of residential licenses.<sup>223</sup>

While early settlement about North Lyell was on level ground on Philosopher's Ridge, latter activity saw the expansion of buildings on the steeper slopes. The temporary nature of the buildings belied the prosperity enjoyed by the residents. In November 1900 it was considered that there was no place on the West Coast where money flowed more freely. Commercial properties included the North Lyell Hotel, a drapery store, two butcheries, a green grocer, bakery, barber and a tobacconist. The town's amenities comprised a Post and Telegraph office and telephone bureau, a private school, a police station, and Doctor Hodgkinson's medical practice. Despite these improvements, the town could not match the superior social amenities and infrastructure of Gormanston and Linda. To its advantage, North Lyell was near the mines. The *Mount Lyell Standard* expressed doubt about the town's future 'owing mostly to its awkward position, yet it is manifest that it is destined to grow much larger.'<sup>224</sup>

In the early months of 1901 the festering question of further expansion at North Lyell was resolved. From 1 January 1901 the government refused to issue any further permits for residential occupation on mining leases. Unlicensed occupations were fined between £5 and £50 in accordance with *The Residence Areas Act, 1900*. These decisions, combined with the forcible eviction of squatters at Kelly Basin in August the

<sup>219</sup> R Sticht letter to LC Clark, 27 September 1899, Letterbook from the General Manager to the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/49, pp. 168-169, AOT.

<sup>220</sup> R Sticht letter to LC Clark, 4 October 1899, Letterbook from the General Manager to the Engineer-in-Charge, NS 1711/49, pp. 174-175, AOT.

<sup>221</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>222</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 28 May 1900.

<sup>223</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 June 1900.

<sup>224</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 29 November 1900.

previous year, confirmed the government's strong anti-squatting stance.<sup>225</sup> Responding to the edict, some 300 residents met at North Lyell on 12 January 1901 to discuss a plan of action. The miners believed it was their right to build on the mineral leases, providing the activity was condoned by mine managers. The meeting acknowledged that blasting activities threatened some huts and these should be relocated. A vigilance committee was formed to monitor the situation and a "fighting fund" established to challenge the government. Cynicism was expressed at the earlier process that had occurred in Zeehan, where miners were forced to move from the leases and buy land in Zeehan at "fancy" prices from the politicians who had speculated in real estate. It was alleged that local politicians had invested in lots in the Linda Valley and would profit should the evictions proceed.<sup>226</sup>

The North Lyell residents eventually realised government intended to limit the spread of squatters about the Lyell field. Government's promise to upgrade the roads between the mines and Linda and Gormanston did much to appease those forced to move to these towns. It was considered locally that a train would eventually connect Gormanston and the North Lyell mine, enabling a large proportion of the residents to settle in Gormanston and enjoy its superior amenities.<sup>227</sup> With expansion halted, many left the area. Those remaining suffered appalling sanitary conditions. Stable manure, rotting garbage and the pollution of the small water holes used for residential water supplies all contributed to typhoid.<sup>228</sup> The stench from the "unpleasant drainage" from the hillside settlement was most noticeable to the residents living along the creek in the Linda township below.<sup>229</sup>

Through the amalgamation and acquisition program, the Mount Lyell Company assumed control by 1905 of many of the leases about Mount Lyell. This enabled Sticht to squeeze out the remaining squatters, most of whom he considered to be a bad and intractable lot.<sup>230</sup> Sticht had previously observed the tendency for undesirables to gravitate towards North Lyell. One new arrival, an Assyrian hawker, had been evicted from the Company's mining lease and his hut demolished. Sticht fought the granting of a freehold title to the North Lyell Hotel owned by a brother of James Long, the local

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<sup>225</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 January 1901.

<sup>226</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 14 January 1901.

<sup>227</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 25 February 1901.

<sup>228</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 7 May 1901.

<sup>229</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 June 1903.

<sup>230</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 8 May 1906, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, p. 887, AOT.

labour representative and the local member for the House of Assembly seat of Lyell.<sup>231</sup> He need not have worried for the hotel burnt down a few weeks later and was not rebuilt. Services to the remnants of the settlement were further downgraded when the post office was closed in October 1905. Sticht was confident the town was on its last legs, advising his directors 'under the circumstances there is every hope that the North Lyell settlement will, through purely natural developments, more or less, die out in course of time.'<sup>232</sup>

Sticht's predictions proved largely correct. By early 1907 fourteen iron and wooden structures at North Lyell were occupied by Company employees. Russell Murray, the Engineer-in-Chief, lived locally in a substantially built six-roomed weatherboard house.<sup>233</sup> The accommodation proved fortuitous to the Company. During the period of labour shortages in 1911 it offered board to the newly-arrived men, thirty of whom were housed at North Lyell.<sup>234</sup> The Company sold some of the more isolated huts about the North Lyell area to employees as an incentive for them to bring their families into the district. Murray considered that, apart from the social benefits of attracting stable workers, it made economic sense as the buildings were mostly 'scattered and isolated, and the effecting of repairs and upkeep would not be practicable.'<sup>235</sup> Without access to normal town amenities, the remaining private occupations about the Lyell mines continued to dwindle over the years. The Gormanston Municipal Assessment Roll for 1930 showed two privately-owned houses, with the Mount Lyell Company retaining one house and a boarding establishment.<sup>236</sup> The commencement of the open-cut mining of the West Lyell orebody in 1934 saw a large area of Philosopher's Ridge transformed into mining operations. The final remnants of the North Lyell settlement were consumed by the mining activities.<sup>237</sup>

The last of the four mining settlements located about Mount Lyell was Lyell Comstock, sited on the northernmost extent of the mountain face, near the headwaters of the East Queen River and the Lyell Comstock Creek. The area was initially

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<sup>231</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 12 September 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, pp. 173-174, AOT.

<sup>232</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 10 October 1905, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/321, pp. 240-241, AOT.

<sup>233</sup> Return for 1906, compiled 9 January 1907, showing occupation of Company's properties, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/251, p. 731, AOT.

<sup>234</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 June 1912.

<sup>235</sup> R Murray letter to Local Superintendent, 23 June 1914, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/254, p. 383, AOT.

<sup>236</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 5 May 1930, p. 1331.

<sup>237</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 281.

prospected for gold c. 1890, on the twenty acre lease of the Tasma Mine.<sup>238</sup> Copper was discovered in the Lyell Comstock area around the height of the copper exploration boom. Experts considered the copper to be an isolated ore body, differing in chemical composition to the ore mined on the southern side of Mount Lyell. In 1901 the two major concerns on the field, the Tasman and Crown Lyell Extended No Liability Company and the Mount Lyell Comstock Copper Company Limited, agreed with the North Mount Lyell Copper Company to construct a railway from Gormanston, via North Lyell, to the Comstock Valley. The copper ore would be railed to Crotty for smelting. A six mile seventy chain railway was eventually surveyed from the Linda station, around the eastern flanks of Mount Lyell, to the copper mines. Construction commenced in November 1901.<sup>239</sup>

The steeply graded line was laid only as far as the three and a half mile mark before works were abandoned in May 1903, following the amalgamation of the North Mount Lyell and Mount Lyell Companies. Without reliable all-weather access, mining activity at Lyell Comstock stalled. Some years later an alternate route was investigated via the Mount Lyell Company's wooden firewood tram that had been extended up the Queen River Valley, on the western side of Mount Lyell.<sup>240</sup> In 1909 the Tasman and Crown Lyell Company negotiated the extension of the Queen River tram to export its galena (silver ore) to Regatta Point and its copper ore to the Mount Lyell Reduction Works.<sup>241</sup> Initially the Lyell Comstock mines were of little interest to the Mount Lyell Company. Upon discovering that its rich North Lyell orebody extended into the adjacent Mount Lyell Comstock Copper Company's leases, it negotiated the purchase of the lease in 1912, at a price of £18,176 11s.7d. The amount was considered reasonable as the lease contained both the rich North Lyell ore and the partially developed mine at Lyell Comstock.<sup>242</sup>

The purchase proved fortuitous. The 12 October 1912 fire in the North Lyell mine forced the Company to suspend its underground operations. It was then able to commence exploration work at the newly-acquired Lyell Comstock mine. The Queen River tramway was upgraded to carry ten ton steam locomotives and extended a further

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<sup>238</sup> WT Batchelor letter to R Sticht, 6 March 1905, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/251, p. 186, AOT.

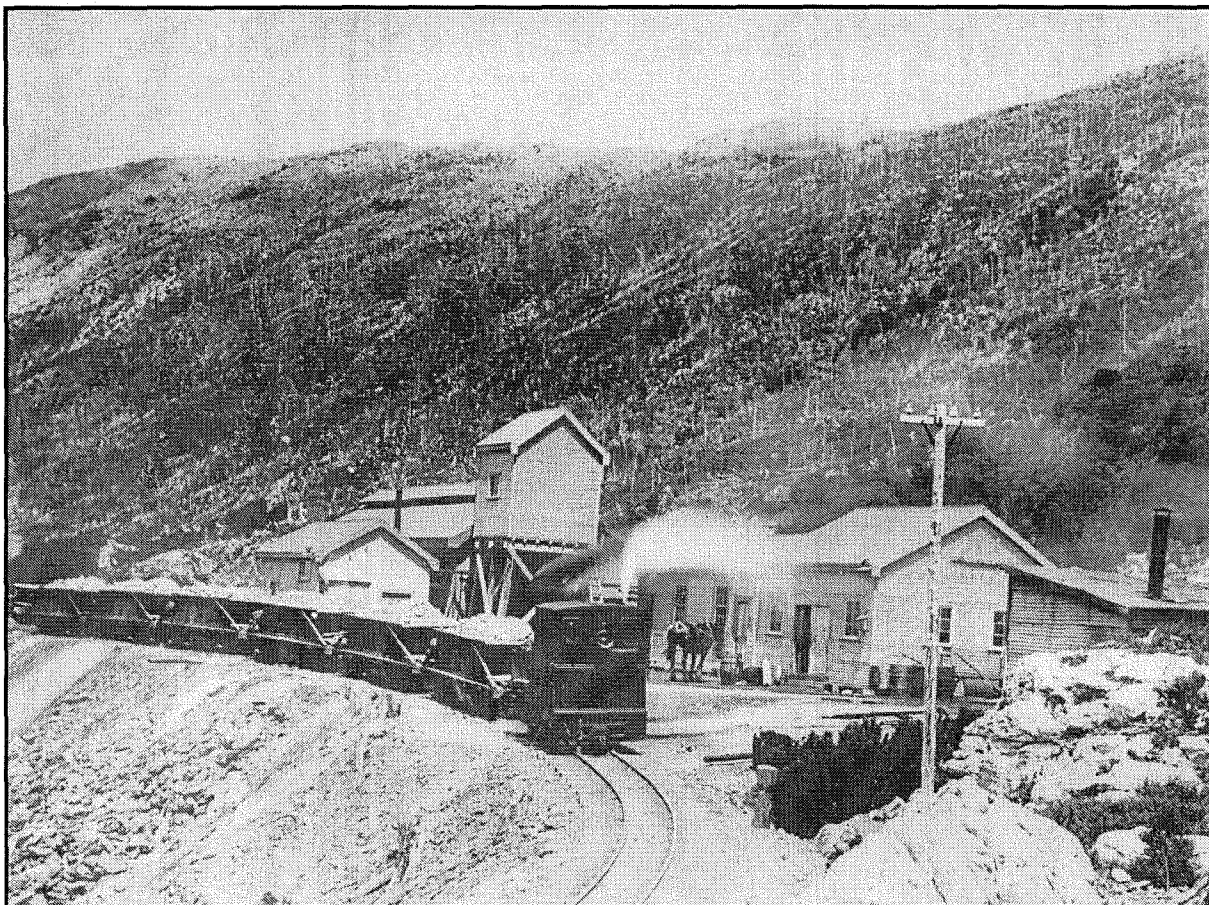
<sup>239</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 November 1901.

<sup>240</sup> WT Batchelor letter to R Sticht, 6 March 1905, Confidential Letterbook of the Engineer-in-Charge to the General Manager, NS 1711/251, pp. 186-188, AOT.

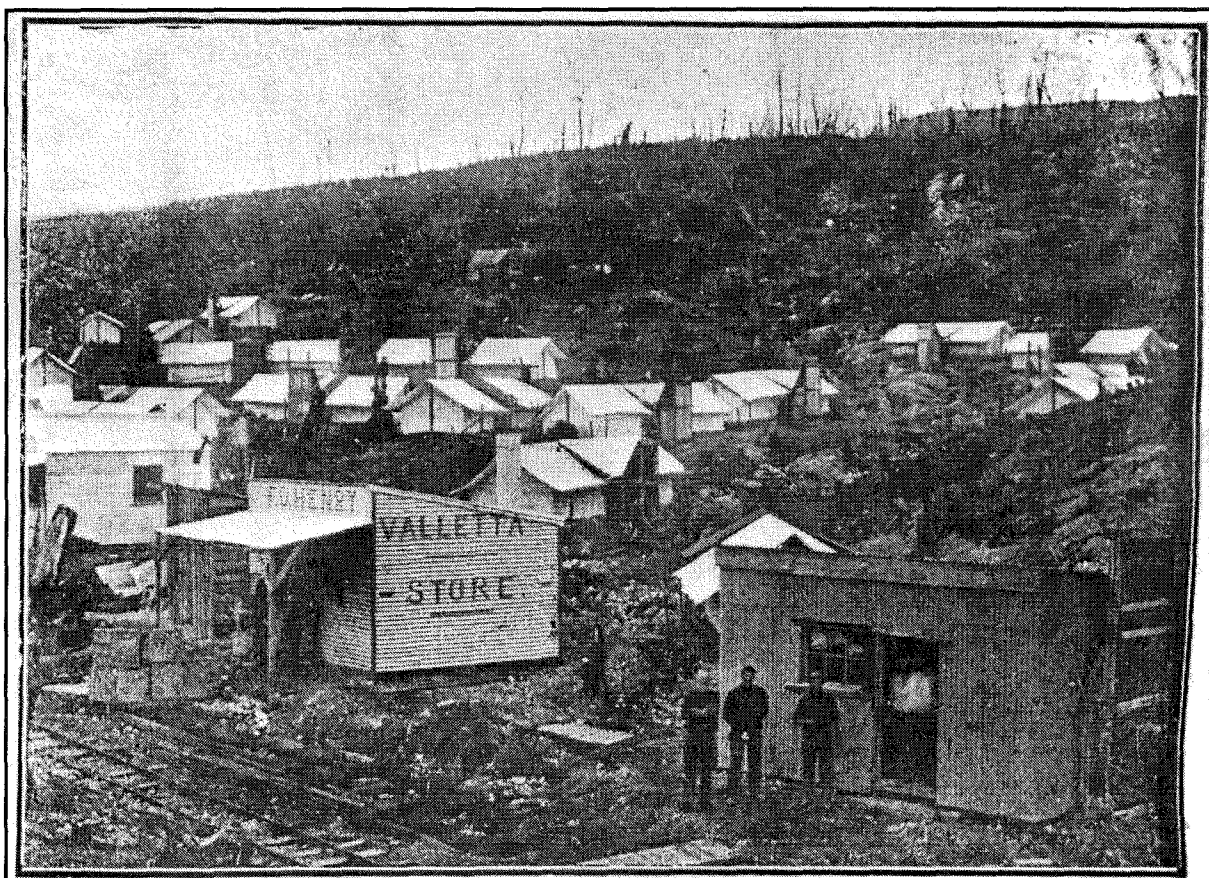
<sup>241</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 5 January 1909, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, pp. 229-231, AOT.

<sup>242</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-year ending 30 September 1912, Queenstown.





LYELL COMSTOCK WORKS – c. 1927



‘VALLETTA’ – TEMPORARY TOWN FOR MALTESE - HOWARD’S PLAINS

one mile and twenty-four chains to the foot of the hill below the mine. A self-acting incline was installed to provide access to the various mine levels. Mine buildings were erected and, owing to the remote nature of the mine, a foreman's cottage and twelve huts were erected for the workers to live onsite.<sup>243</sup> Learning from prior events in Linda, Penghana and North Lyell, the Company sought to retain total control of the development of the Lyell Comstock village. The Company applied to the Crown for a residential lease of sixty acres, enabling it to evict trespassers 'whenever the emergencies of the case demand.'<sup>244</sup> The lease was granted a short time later.<sup>245</sup> The Company had already achieved a major victory when, in enforcing its policy of temperance, it successfully appealed against the erection of a hotel near the mine. As Sticht doubted the longevity of the workings, he did not seek to have a formal township declared.<sup>246</sup>

The Lyell Comstock town site was located on a fertile slope at the top end of the Sedgwick Valley and was sheltered from the sulphur fallout that had ravaged the other mining towns. Its climate was well suited to vegetables, fruit trees and gardens. Tall forests abounded and a large area of grass had been cultivated to graze prime bullocks. In 1913 a shop was built to serve the settlement.<sup>247</sup> Work at the mine proceeded slowly while the Company developed a flotation process to treat the sulphur rich ore. Although the new Flotation Mill was commissioned on 17 February 1916, it was not an immediate success. Travelling comfort for the sixty to seventy residents of the Lyell Comstock village was improved in 1917 with the provision of a covered passenger carriage.<sup>248</sup> As copper prices fell during 1920, the mine workforce was cut from thirty-nine in September<sup>249</sup> to two by the end of 1921.<sup>250</sup>

After virtually no work for seven years, exploratory work on the Lyell Comstock ore recommenced in 1928. By the end of the year twenty-three men were employed at the workings.<sup>251</sup> Mine facilities were upgraded and the 'small town of forty or fifty dwellings, dilapidated through years of idleness, was renovated and re-peopled.'<sup>252</sup>

<sup>243</sup> R Murray letter to General Manager, 19 April 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, pp. 41-43, AOT.

<sup>244</sup> B Sawyer letter to BS Bird, 23 June 1913, Staff Letters, NS 1711/553, pp. 279-282, AOT.

<sup>245</sup> General Manager's Report, 21 October 1913, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/329, p. 671, AOT.

<sup>246</sup> R Sticht, letter to BS Bird, 8 May 1913, Staff Letters, NS 1711/553, pp. 250-251, AOT.

<sup>247</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 8 April 1913.

<sup>248</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 July 1917.

<sup>249</sup> Return for Quarter ending 30 September 1920, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/678, p. 444, AOT.

<sup>250</sup> Return for Quarter ending 31 December 1921, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/679, p. 451, AOT.

<sup>251</sup> Return for the Calendar Year 1928, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/683, p. 409, AOT.

<sup>252</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 272.



Mining operations increased considerably. The previous maximum figure of 15,607 tons mined in 1917/18,<sup>253</sup> was extended to 126,578 tons in 1932/33.<sup>254</sup> By the end of 1933 fifty-one men worked on the surface and a further 284 underground.<sup>255</sup> Town facilities were upgraded. A water storage supply was completed and workers huts renovated.<sup>256</sup> The tramway service was improved over the six miles between Queenstown and the village. By 1933 twenty-three children travelled to school in Queenstown. A school was eventually opened in the village on 11 September 1935. Mining activities were curtailed in 1944, the closure of the Lyell Comstock mine being blamed on the shortage of skilled miners and the high expense of transporting the ore to the works.<sup>257</sup>

Three miles north west of Lyell Comstock was the small village of Lake Margaret, established in 1914 on the banks of the Yolande River, close to the power station. The settlement comprised seven substantially built cottages each with six rooms. Domestic services included a water supply, sewerage and electric light.<sup>258</sup> Without shops, school, post office or medical facilities, its residents were totally reliant on the 2' gauge tramway to make the seven mile trip into Queenstown. Apart from the generation of electricity, the area supplied trout fingerlings and yearlings to stock the Lyell waterways. Instigated by Russell Murray in 1927, the breeding program at the Leslie Rivulet trout hatchery proved most successful. A concrete rearing pond, divided into two compartments for breeding, held up to 80,000 brown and rainbow trout. The program promoted the development of healthy, outdoor recreational activities for workers. Tourists to the Lyell area appreciated the game fishing opportunities provided by the lakes and rivers in the Lyell district.<sup>259</sup>

Like the mining settlements, the three North Mount Lyell towns of Crotty, Darwin and Pillinger became totally dependent on the Mount Lyell Company for survival. Their chances were minimal once the Company announced it would retain its smelters, railway and port operations at Regatta Point as the mainstay of its operations.

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<sup>253</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Year ending 30 September 1918, Queenstown.

<sup>254</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Year ending 30 September 1933, Queenstown.

<sup>255</sup> Return for Quarter ending 31 December 1933, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/686, p. 543, AOT.

<sup>256</sup> General Manager's Report, 16 October 1929, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/351, pp. 172-173, AOT.

<sup>257</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 289.

<sup>258</sup> H Clarke report to General Manager, 12 October 1915, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/331, p. 777, AOT.

<sup>259</sup> *Examiner*, 17 February 1937.

## North Mount Lyell Company Towns

The initial land sales in all three North Mount Lyell towns revealed strong market confidence in the Company's operations. This trust proved misplaced as the Company struggled to overcome smelting and ongoing management problems. This section examines the buoyant beginnings and the rapid decline in fortunes of the towns following the North Mount Lyell Company's amalgamation with the Mount Lyell Company's operations.

Aside from its mining operations at Mount Lyell, the North Mount Lyell Copper Company's activities were spread out over a considerable distance along the railway between Kelly Basin and Linda. At Kelly Basin the town of Pillinger was divided into two distinct settlements. West Pillinger was located on the western side of the Kelly Basin inlet, adjacent to the Company's deepwater port and railway terminus. A mile around the Basin, at East Pillinger, the Company developed its industrial operations which included a sawmill, clay pits and brick works. Kelly Basin offered good sheltered facilities for shipping operations, with bold water almost to the shoreline. West Pillinger comprised a flat to medium sloped area with a sheltered northerly outlook. It was adequately drained and well suited for town allotments.<sup>260</sup> Surveys of the first 213 lots were completed in the first half of 1898 and listed for sale by auction on 6 August 1898 in Strahan.<sup>261</sup>

Squatters were again a problem, with 120 squatters moving onto the foreshore land before the surveys were completed.<sup>262</sup> This time it was hoped the government would evict them and reassure lawful purchasers that their land would not be depreciated by the inappropriate development. A similar problem had occurred along the Strahan foreshore where squatters were allowed to remain despite statements to the contrary.<sup>263</sup> Apart from the land offered at auction, the government allowed the balloting for residential licenses in some sections. To encourage development on the licensed sites, and prevent profiteering by speculators, the government stated that it would not transfer title until improvements had been effected to the required upset value. The keenly contested ballot was held 3 August 1898. Successful bidders were required to declare their intent to occupy the land.<sup>264</sup> The 6 August auction of the freehold land saw eighty-four lots sell of the one hundred and three offered, the average

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<sup>260</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 April 1898.

<sup>261</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 5 July 1898, pp. 1177-1178.

<sup>262</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 12 July 1898.

<sup>263</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 July 1898.

price being £46 11s.3d., and the highest price paid reaching £157 for a lot near the post and telegraph office. The sale was the subject of much interest, with many speculators keen to profit from the North Mount Lyell mining and smelting enterprise. The *Mount Lyell Standard* commented that the sale was 'beyond the expectations of the most sanguine. To some of the people present it appeared as if the days of the Victorian land boom were revived.'<sup>265</sup>

Despite the Government's anti-squatter policy, 300 people illegally settled on the Crown foreshore reservation around Kelly Basin. Most occupations were on the eastern side, later to become known as East Pillinger. The government was criticised for allowing the occurrence. As a result, road works were delayed and legitimate purchasers disadvantaged.<sup>266</sup> Formal notices to quit were served on the illegal foreshore residents in November 1899.<sup>267</sup> After further procrastination Minister Mulcahy finally announced in May 1900 that he had 'absolutely decided to have all buildings which have been illegally erected on the clay reserve and wharfage easement at Kelly Basin removed.'<sup>268</sup>

The illegal occupations encouraged inappropriate development. Properties were inadequately serviced and presented a health risk. Aware that sympathetic groups of illegal occupiers at both North Lyell and Queenstown (Conglomerate Creek) were monitoring the situation at Kelly Basin, the government defended its anti-squatter stance in Parliament. It rejected the argument that it had been common practice for men on the West Coast to reside on Crown land, close to their place of work.<sup>269</sup> On 1 August 1900 evictions commenced, with some twenty-four offending shops, huts and dwellings at East Pillinger pulled down. Police provided back up support. The evictions created considerable protest, locally, in other mining towns, and in Parliament. In one instance the Crown pursued a further action in the Court.<sup>270</sup>

The evolution of the name for the settlement at Kelly Basin was confusing. Initially known as Macquarie, the name changed several times over eighteen months. The 6 May 1899 death of Alfred Pillinger, Minister for Lands, saw Pillinger adopted as the new name for the town the following month, although the common feeling was that it was likely 'to be always better known as Kelly Basin.'<sup>271</sup> By October 1899 the Lands

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<sup>264</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 5 August 1898.

<sup>265</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 10 August 1898.

<sup>266</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 October 1898.

<sup>267</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 28 November 1899, p. 2140.

<sup>268</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 15 May 1900.

<sup>269</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 26 July 1900.

<sup>270</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 August 1900.

<sup>271</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 June 1899.

Department still used Macquarie, while the postal authorities used Pillinger. The Central Board of Health had refused to recognise Macquarie, instead registering the township as Sorrento.<sup>272</sup> Use of Sorrento temporarily gathered momentum until on 16 July 1900 the Surveyor-General had it proclaimed Pillinger.<sup>273</sup> The town's official boundaries were proclaimed on 4 April 1901.<sup>274</sup>

Developed around the North Mount Lyell Company's operations, Pillinger blossomed as a works construction depot. By the end of 1901 the town's amenities included a post office, police station, private hospital and a school. With the settlement still not large enough to warrant a Town Board, it was left to the local Progress Committee to advise the various government departments as to the town's wants and needs. This proved most inefficient and the town suffered through time delays and a lack of will and understanding by the Hobart bureaucracy. With the assistance of the North Mount Lyell Company, a permanent supply of fresh water was extended to the town by March 1901.<sup>275</sup> A Local Board of Health monitored the sanitary needs and conditions.<sup>276</sup> The town's population peaked in 1902 with 'about 600 inhabitants, 80 dwellings and 25 businesses, including stores, tradesmen, three hotels, shipping agents, and a coffee palace.'<sup>277</sup>

Pillinger's prosperity depended on the Crotty smelters. The export of copper and the importing of general materials and substantial amounts of coke and coal promised to generate considerable activity across the wharves. The general history of the port and railway activities was discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. Unfortunately, Lamartine Trent's much publicised reverberatory furnaces did not live up to expectations. The failure of the smelters eventually opened the way for the Mount Lyell Company to control the North Mount Lyell empire on 22 May 1903, dooming the town and its port operations. Following the takeover many inhabitants deserted Pillinger, leaving 'an all pervading sense of loneliness about the place that is tediously depressing.'<sup>278</sup> By March 1904 only sixty to seventy people remained.<sup>279</sup> Before the 1925 closure of the railway between Darwin and Pillinger, the Mount Lyell Company completed the purchase of nearly every freehold property at Kelly Basin. The district was virtually deserted with no

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<sup>272</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 30 October 1899.

<sup>273</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 17 July 1900, p. 1099.

<sup>274</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1901, p. 925.

<sup>275</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 March 1901.

<sup>276</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 December 1901.

<sup>277</sup> D Bannear, *King River to Kelly Basin Archaeological Survey*, Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage Occasional Paper No. 29, 1991, p. 8.

<sup>278</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 9 June 1903.

<sup>279</sup> Report by Superintending Engineer for Year ending 31 March 1904, 14 April 1904, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, pp. 765-766, AOT.

families remaining. The only regular visitors to the area were the timber-cutters from the Gordon River.<sup>280</sup>

The town of Darwin was established in 1899, fourteen miles to the north of Pillinger. Its primary purpose was to house North Mount Lyell employees, who worked in the nearby limestone quarry or cutting timber from the surrounding forests. Both activities were vital to the Company's operations. To a lesser extent, the town served the promising Mount Darwin mineral district, which for a period was the subject of considerable prospecting. A prosperous future was predicted. At the time of the railway extension through the settlement in early 1900, a large hotel, stores and a number of huts, built of Huon pine, had been established.<sup>281</sup> Following the survey of the town, thirty-eight sites were offered for sale as residential licenses and one hundred and four lots were advertised for sale at auction on 25 April 1900.<sup>282</sup> Demand for the land was strong and seventy-three lots were sold on the day, the highest price paid being £270, while many others sold above their reserves.<sup>283</sup> Ninety-nine lots were sold in Darwin during 1900, the Crown reaping £6,139 from the transactions.<sup>284</sup> The town boundaries for Darwin were proclaimed on 4 April 1901, the area comprising 375 acres.<sup>285</sup>

The Darwin Progress Committee was formed midway through 1901 to address the town's services and poor standard roads. The buoyant conditions eventually ebbed and by early February 1902 many men had been laid-off from the flux quarry and timber operations following the failure of the Crotty smelters. The township became deserted, with less than twenty people remaining.<sup>286</sup> The North Mount Lyell Company's last minute change from reverberatory to blast furnaces in September 1902 sparked a minor revival in Darwin. Over the summer of 1902-03 its population increased to around 150 inhabitants. The reprieve proved temporary. As with the other North Mount Lyell Company towns, the Darwin workers and families suffered considerable hardship following the May 1903 amalgamation. Eighty men were laid off immediately. Assistance was sought to enable those worst off to leave the district.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> JPPP, The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1924 (Private), Report of Select Committee, 1924, paper 22, p. 3.

<sup>281</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 8 November 1899.

<sup>282</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 13 March 1900, pp. 310-311, p. 317.

<sup>283</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 April 1900.

<sup>284</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, p. 23.

<sup>285</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1901, p. 925.

<sup>286</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 13 February 1902.

<sup>287</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 June 1903.

Darwin survived to a minor extent, with thirty men gold prospecting about the area the following year. The early promise shown by the Mounts Jukes and Darwin fields did not materialise. Further prospecting was sporadic. The North Lyell railway was retained to transport timber cut from along the line, several of the men choosing to reside in Darwin. By April 1914 only a few huts remained, there being one resident left in the town.<sup>288</sup> Timber traffic on the remaining section of railway between Darwin and Linda petered out by early 1928, the forests within economic distance of the railroad having been exhausted. Russell Murray, giving evidence on 29 September 1928 to the Select Committee convened to consider the closure of the railway, advised the King River bridge would be decked to facilitate road traffic to Crotty and Darwin. No evidence was tendered to the Committee as to any buildings or inhabitants still remaining at Darwin.<sup>289</sup>

Crotty also promised great expectations but never delivered. Named after James Crotty, the smelter's site comprised a level plateau near the eastern end of the King River Gorge, ten miles to the south of Linda. It was identified as the closest practical location to the North Mount Lyell mine with year round water. The area also possessed abundant timber, was accessible to the proposed Linda to Kelly Basin railway and was advantageously located to the promising Mounts Jukes and Darwin mineral belt.<sup>290</sup> Construction of the Crotty smelters commenced in early 1900, having been delayed by the slow progress on the railway, which was required to transport the machinery, bricks and timber from Kelly Basin. The initial town site was surveyed on the banks of the King and Governor Rivers towards the end of 1900. Ample water supplies were available and the land was drained and well adapted for building.<sup>291</sup> Soon after the North Mount Lyell Company chose a more elevated position for its smelters, approximately a mile further south. This action necessitated further survey works, the enlarged town boundaries for Crotty being proclaimed on 4 April 1901.<sup>292</sup> The delay in offering the land for sale had created considerable frustration, with some men squatting in unauthorised areas. Police prevented the men from establishing a foothold. By July

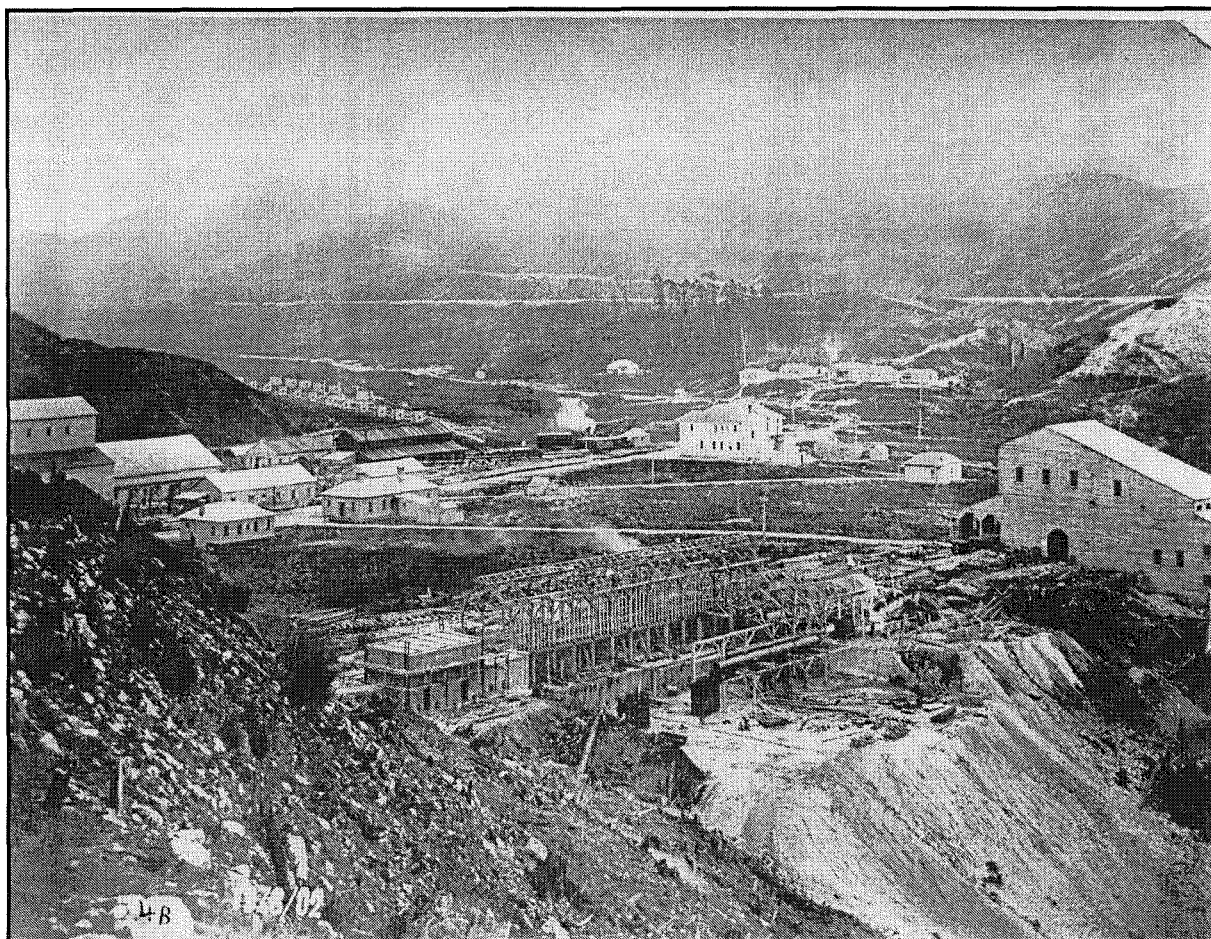
<sup>288</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 April 1914.

<sup>289</sup> JPPP, The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1928 (Private), Report of Select Committee, 1928, paper 23, pp. 2-8.

<sup>290</sup> JPPP, The North Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1897 (Private), Report of Select Committee, 1897, paper 68, pp. 4 & 5.

<sup>291</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, p. 37.

<sup>292</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 9 April 1901, p. 925.



**CONSTRUCTION OF CROTTY SMELTERS – 19 AUGUST 1902**



**CROTTY TOWN AND SMELTERS FROM RAILWAY – c. 1902**



1901 works on the smelters were well advanced and the township boasted a new brick hotel and a number of buildings on the land set aside for residential licenses.<sup>293</sup>

At the auction held in Strahan on 23 October 1901 sixty-eight freehold lots were sold, the highest price being £170, with an average of £60 obtained.<sup>294</sup> Demand for land remained steady for the rest of the year, with the seventy-four lots sold in 1901 returning £4,652 7s.6d.<sup>295</sup> Building works within the new town proceeded slowly, being delayed by the lack of roads, drainage channels and access bridge over the Baxter River. A Progress Committee was formed in February 1902. It sought immediate relocation of the squatters' huts from the smelter's reserve into the town, completion of the railway station and goods shed, and the provision of a post office and school.<sup>296</sup> The early failures of the reverberatory furnaces had created much unease. This temporarily lessened after the September 1902 conversion to blast furnace operations. By December four furnaces were working to capacity, with the high grade copper matte being shipped weekly to England.<sup>297</sup> Workers and families arriving in Crotty were met with a lack of accommodation, some boarding house beds being "double-banked" by men working opposite shifts. The *Mount Lyell Standard* reported that 'there is a rapid fortune to be made by erecting and letting cottages in the town, as no difficulty would be found in letting 50 at high rentals at once.'<sup>298</sup>

Crotty's rapid population growth created new commercial opportunities, prompting the building of a substantial two storied brick hotel, a chemist and a butcher's shop.<sup>299</sup> The December 1902 rating assessments cited one hotel, three boarding houses, two billiard rooms, sixty-five huts, thirty houses and cottages, twenty shops – most with residences, and a sawmill and residence.<sup>300</sup> To facilitate building, the government released further land. Roads and sanitary services in the new town were lacking. The government had not provided a school for the one hundred plus school-age children. A strong case existed for implementing a town board to administer the wants and needs of the growing township. A committee was duly appointed to advance the case.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 16 July 1901.

<sup>294</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 24 October 1901.

<sup>295</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1902, 1902, paper 42, p. 20.

<sup>296</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 18 February 1902.

<sup>297</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 December 1902.

<sup>298</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 2 December 1902.

<sup>299</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 December 1902.

<sup>300</sup> *Hobart Gazette*, 16 December 1902, pp. 2753-2755.

<sup>301</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 24 December 1902.



Speculation mounted over the possible amalgamation of the two major companies. It was considered that if the Mount Lyell Company became dominant, its smelters, railway and port at Regatta Point stood to benefit, as would the towns supporting these ventures. Towards the end of April 1903 rumours had spread that the proposed merger was likely to be abandoned. Crotty would benefit by such an event. Its small but productive smelting plant would require extensive upgrading.<sup>302</sup> News of the apparent reprieve was misplaced and the amalgamation was effected less than a month later. The Mount Lyell Company reigned supreme and by the end of May the Crotty smelters had been closed. Many men and their families were left destitute, their properties valueless. The town folded overnight. Many flocked to Gormanston with the possessions they could carry, others remained marooned at Crotty.<sup>303</sup>

Around Tasmania relief funds were set up. Both the government and the Mount Lyell Company provided assisted passages to enable the unemployed men and their families to leave the district. Where practical, buildings and other salvageable materials were relocated to the mining towns of Linda and Gormanston. The dismantling and sale of the smelter buildings, plant and equipment continued for over a decade.<sup>304</sup> By February 1916 only a hotel and a few buildings remained. At the time Crotty was described as 'a dreary spot at best, on an open, wind-swept plain...the glory of Crotty has departed without much hope of redemption.'<sup>305</sup> Activity in the area was limited to timber cutting and prospecting about Mounts Jukes and Darwin. In 1924 the Mount Lyell Company purchased the Crotty Hotel, with Murray advising that it would be delicensed as its 'use as a hotel in the district was a great nuisance to us so far as our timbergetters in the Crotty district are concerned.'<sup>306</sup> Upon the 1928 closure of the North Lyell railway between Darwin and Linda only one family remained living at Crotty.<sup>307</sup>

Unlike the towns along the North Mount Lyell railway, construction camps excluded, the settlements on the Mount Lyell Company's Abt line had small beginnings and long futures.

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<sup>302</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 April 1903.

<sup>303</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 30 May 1903.

<sup>304</sup> B Sawyer letter to Company Secretary, 15 August 1914, The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited Collection, File 5/1/5, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>305</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 7 February 1916.

<sup>306</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 8 February 1924, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/345, p. 518, AOT.

<sup>307</sup> JPPP, The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1928 (Private), Report of Select Committee, 1928, paper 23, p. 8. An archaeological investigation of Crotty was completed in 1991: refer to J McCarthy, *Phase 2 Archaeological Investigation of the King River Power Development Scheme*, 1991, commissioned by the Hydro-Electric Commission, Hobart.

## Outlying Settlements along the Mount Lyell Railway

Because of the nature of the Abt System operations, it was necessary for the Mount Lyell Company to maintain a number of small towns along the length of its railway between Queenstown and Regatta Point. The following section briefly outlines the histories of the settlements and their principal roles under the Mount Lyell Company's regime.

Located just over five miles south along the railway from Queenstown was Hall's Creek, the marshalling station at the base of the 1 in 16 Abt grade. During the 1895/96 construction works a small settlement was established, comprising a boarding house and a number of huts.<sup>308</sup> At the height of the wood cutting era (1907-1914) the Hall's Creek huts were occupied by timber-getters.<sup>309</sup> The station at Hall's Creek was not permanently manned and attracted little mention once the timber activities were abandoned. At the top of the Abt incline, a further two miles on from Halls Creek, was the small settlement of Rinadeena, which was occupied by signalmen and railway maintenance employees. Located at the highest point on the line (753 feet above sea level) Rinadeena suffered a wet climate, its Aboriginal derivation being raindrop,<sup>310</sup> although the word sounded more like "Rain-indeed" to track construction workers.<sup>311</sup> Rinadeena was used as a marshalling yard, watering stop and a passing bay for railway traffic. Mount Lyell records indicate the area was ravaged by fires on a number of occasions, the last being on 9 February 1934 when two railway cottages and a signal cabin were destroyed.<sup>312</sup>

Dubbil Barril was also a permanent station, located at the western end of the Abt incline, nine and a half miles from Queenstown. The derivation of its name is unclear, although original railway survey plans show the adjacent stream as Double Barrel Creek.<sup>313</sup> Close to the King River, the various building improvements comprised station buildings, a signalman's house and two track workers' cottages. Floods were a major bugbear, those of April 1906 and May 1908 causing the Company to re-site all three residences 'beyond the influence of the King River floodwaters.'<sup>314</sup> As with Hall's Creek, Dubbil Barril was a busy marshalling yard. Here the trains split their

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<sup>308</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 28 April 1896.

<sup>309</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 15 April 1908.

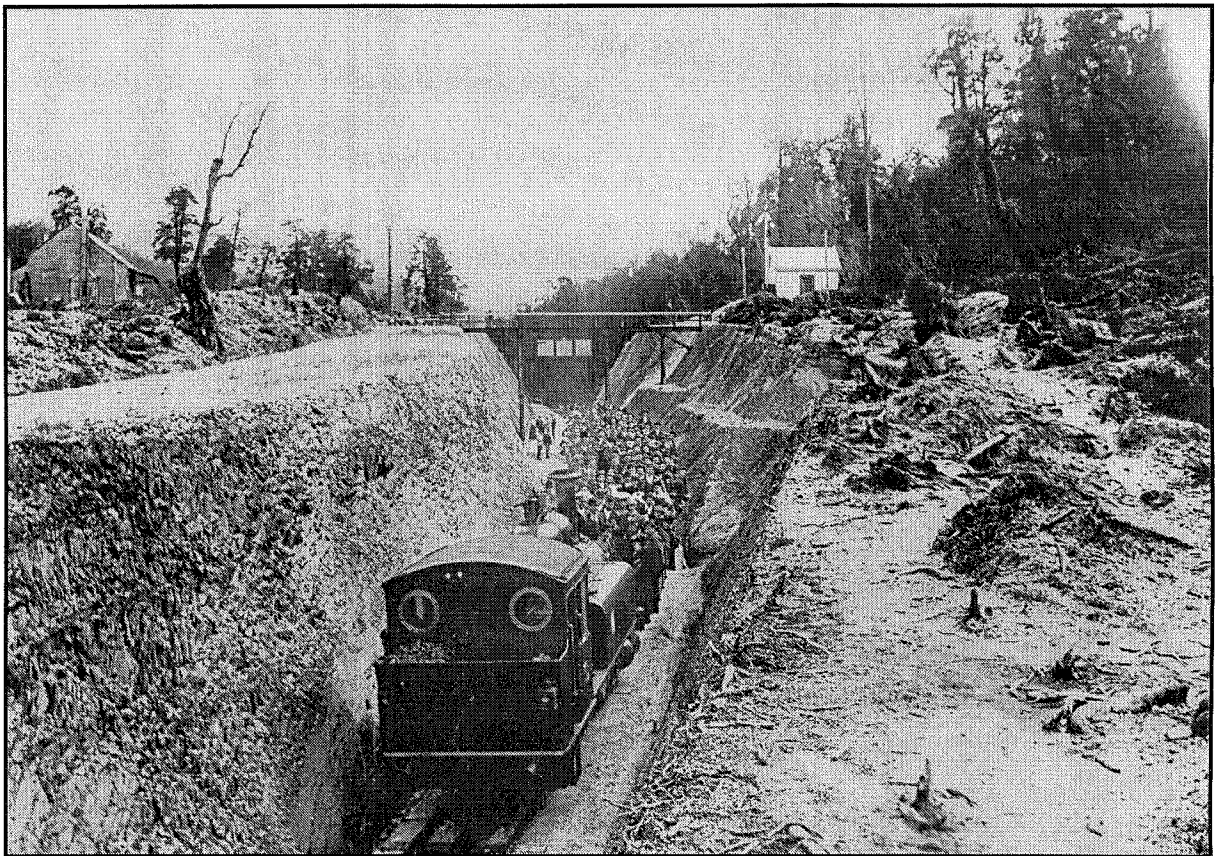
<sup>310</sup> Taylor, *Tasmanian Place Names – The Aboriginal Connection*, p. 103.

<sup>311</sup> Zeehan & Dundas Herald, 15 April 1896.

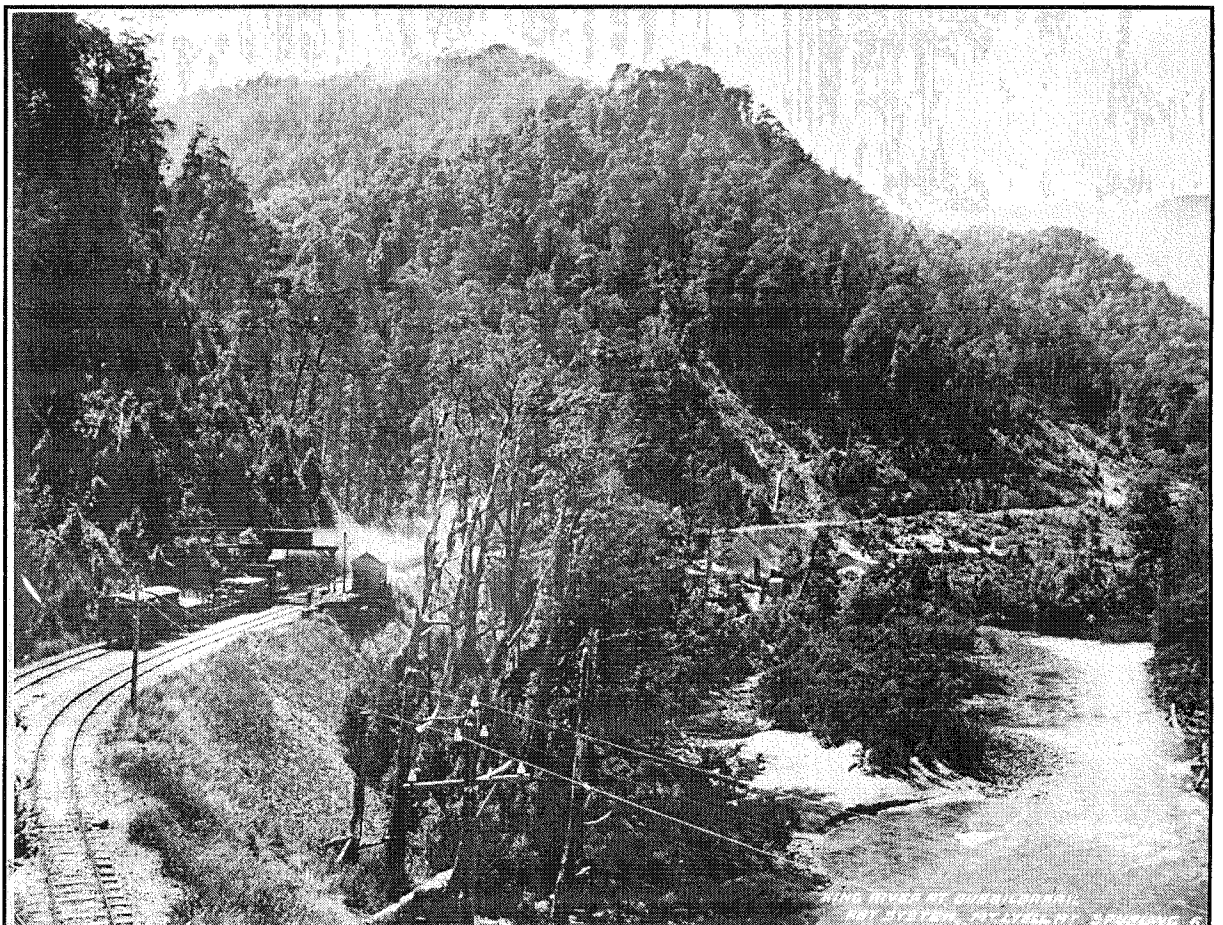
<sup>312</sup> R Murray letter to Company Secretary, 13 February 1934, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/356, pp. 47-48, AOT.

<sup>313</sup> Mount Lyell Railway Survey, Section No. 2, Sheet 5, Galley Museum, Queenstown.

<sup>314</sup> Half-yearly Report ending 30 September 1908 to General Manager, 14 October 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/324, p. 350, AOT.



PICNIC TRAIN AT RINADEENA – 5 DECEMBER 1897



DUBBIL BARRIL, AT BASE OF 1 in 20 ABT – c. 1905

loads prior to the steep haul up the 1 in 20 grade. A further mile and three quarters on from Dubbil Barril, towards Strahan, was the main construction village of Camp Spur. It was one of the few level areas along the railway with sufficient space for sidings and stores. Much of the early rolling stock was ambled at Camp Spur, as was the first section of Abt line for testing purposes prior to it being laid. At the height of construction (1895-96), Camp Spur was a busy place, comprising the engineer's residence, a blacksmith's shop, an engine shed, and numerous tents and workmen's huts.<sup>315</sup>

After the railway's completion all rolling stock was moved from Camp Spur to Queenstown.<sup>316</sup> Track maintenance workers occupied the former engineer's residence for many years afterwards. The largest town along the railway was Teepookana, thirteen and three quarter miles from Queenstown. Between 1894 and 1899 the settlement thrived as a temporary port for the Mount Lyell Company – as described in Chapter 3. Upon the opening of the railway extension to Regatta Point, much of the town and port infrastructure was removed. The Mount Lyell Company retained a number of houses for use by railway maintenance crews. Teepookana was also the centre for nearby timber harvesting operations for many years. In 1910 it became the location for the railway's bridge maintenance depot.<sup>317</sup>

Located midway between Teepookana and Regatta Point, adjacent to the mouth of the King River and eighteen miles from Queenstown, was the rural and timber milling district of Lowana. Two maintenance cottages were constructed alongside the railway around 1901.<sup>318</sup> In 1908 a siding was installed for the King River sawmill.<sup>319</sup> The railway provided ready access to the low lying flats extending around the shores of Lettes Bay towards Regatta Point. Cultivating the land was not easy. Sticht had remarked in March 1908 that 'there is some farming going on in that district, but, as there is but little sun here, it is a precarious business, and even the most successful of

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<sup>315</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 17 September 1896.

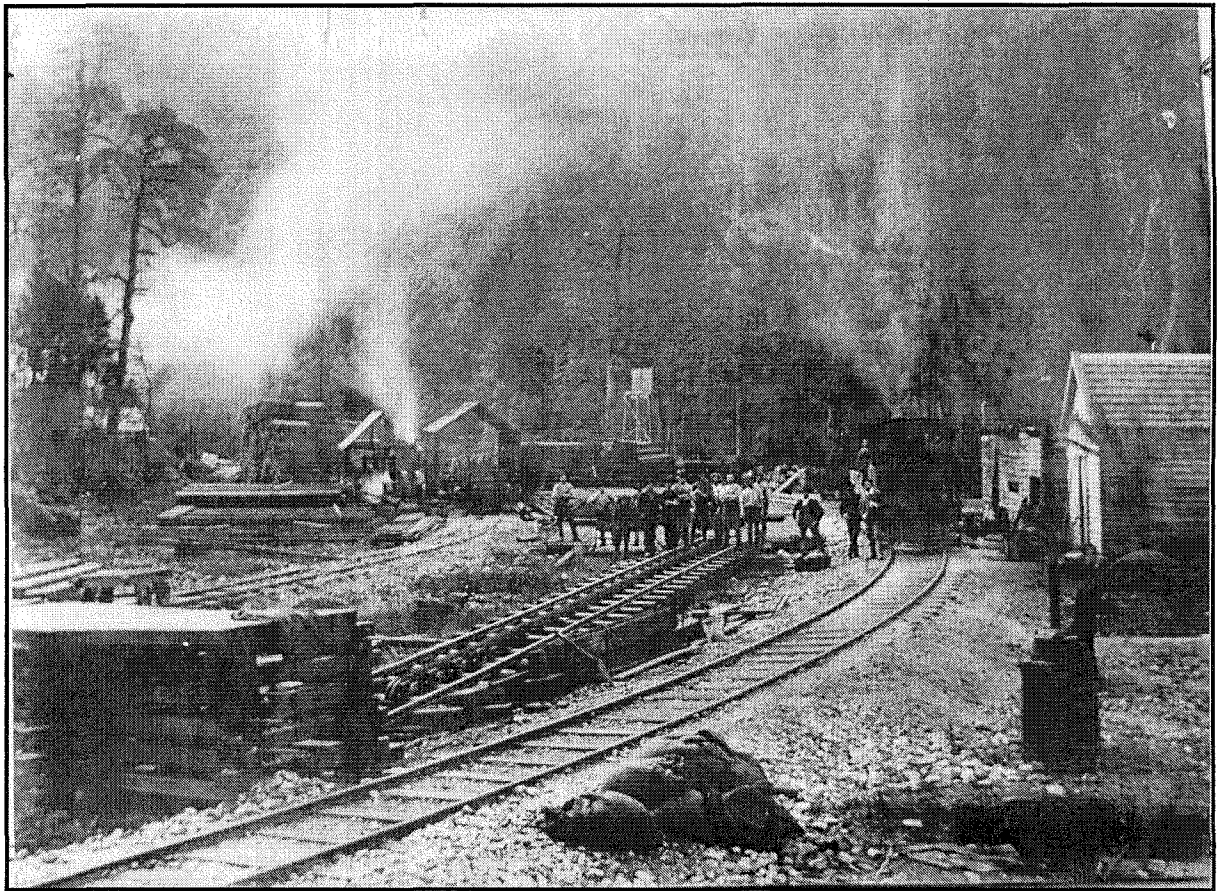
<sup>316</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>317</sup> Half-yearly Report ending 30 September 1910 to General Manager, 10 October 1910, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/326, p. 406, AOT. Two recent studies provide greater detail of the occupations and activities within the immediate district and include: C Snelgrove, *Results of an Archaeological Survey and Management Plan for Teepookana on the King River*, 1992, commissioned by the West Coast District of the Forestry Commission and R Annear, *We Find a Way or Make It – A Cultural Heritage Survey of the Lower King River Valley*, 1989, commissioned by the Queenstown District of the Forestry Commission.

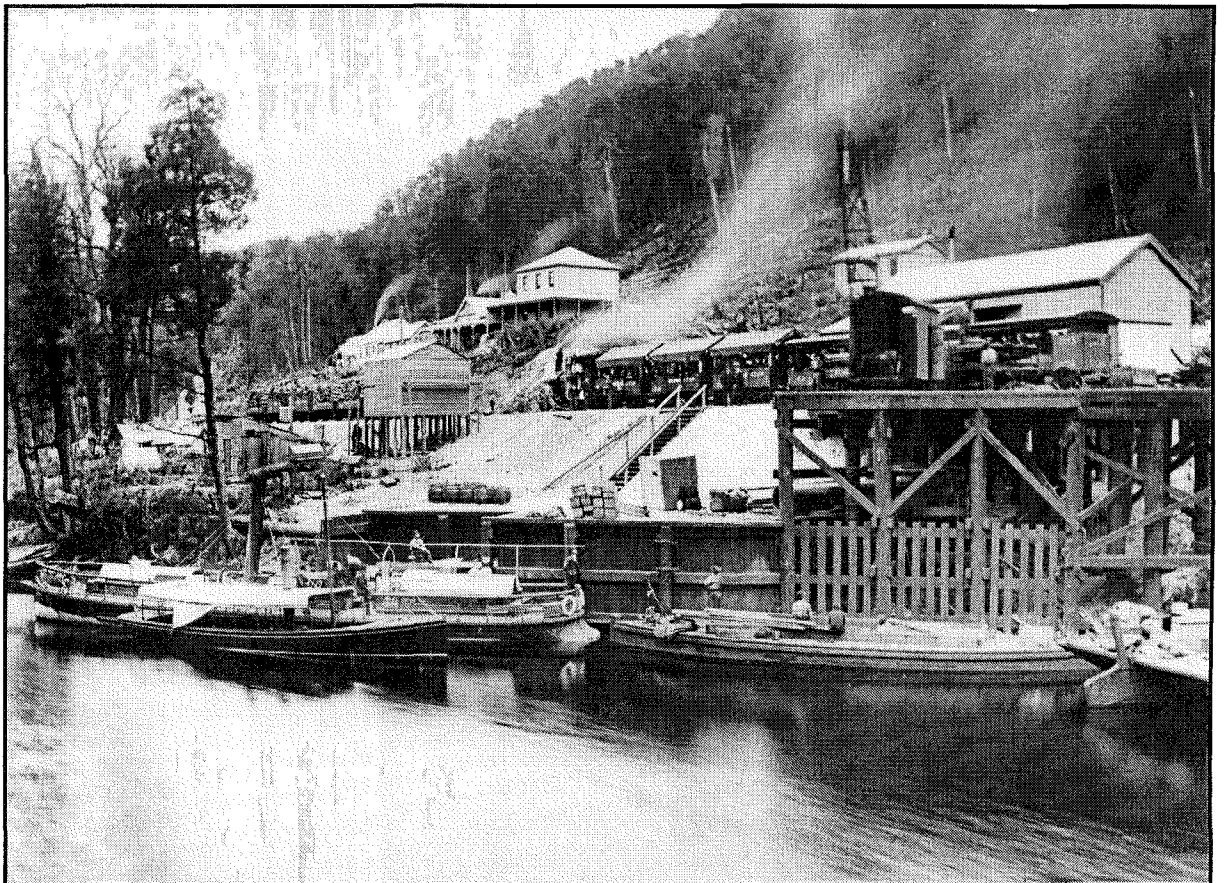
<sup>318</sup> Half-yearly Report ending 31 March 1901 to General Manager, 13 April 1901, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/316, p. 918, AOT.

<sup>319</sup> Half-yearly Report ending 31 March 1901 to General Manager, 13 April 1908, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/323, p. 883, AOT.





CONSTRUCTION VILLAGE OF CAMP SPUR - 1896



THE BUSY PORT OF TEEPOOKANA – c. 1897

the men (real farmers) working at Lowana, is not making much more than a living.<sup>320</sup> The Government progressively opened up the land along the railway following local agitation for the establishment of a dairy and pig rearing industry to supply the mining population of the West Coast.<sup>321</sup>

The remaining settlement was located at the far-western end of Lettes Bay,<sup>322</sup> approximately twenty miles from Queenstown. Developed on foreshore Crown land by the Mount Lyell Company in 1920, as part of its social welfare scheme, bathing boxes were sited close to 'an extensive and beautiful shallow beach, which is an ideal place for children paddling, and there is also good fishing.'<sup>323</sup> Three houses, each divided into two apartments, and a single-men's hut, were completed for occupation in 1921. The Queenstown Young Men's Christian Association supervised daily operations of the Lettes Bay holiday village.<sup>324</sup> At the terminus of the railway, twenty-one and a quarter miles from Queenstown, was the Mount Lyell Company's wharf and railway station. Replacing Teepookana as the Company's port upon the extension of the railway on 1 November 1899, the Regatta Point wharf area was generally cramped for room, necessitating a quick turn around of freight and the use of coal hulks as temporary storage from time to time. The general port activities were discussed in Chapter 3.

The station also served as the terminus of the Government's line from Zeehan, making it a busy passenger and freight transfer destination. Apart from the wharf and railway buildings, the Company erected two substantial houses, a terrace of four dwellings and a cottage for its staff.<sup>325</sup> Near the wharf were a hotel and a number of private residences. The *Mount Lyell Standard* considered the settlement an extension to Strahan.<sup>326</sup> The settlement of Strahan was the oldest surviving town in the region and it prospered from time to time as a result of the Mount Lyell Company's operations but it was never totally dependent on the Company for survival.

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<sup>320</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 13 March 1908, Confidential Mining Letterbook of the General Manager, NS 1711/37, p. 4, AOT.

<sup>321</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 May 1910.

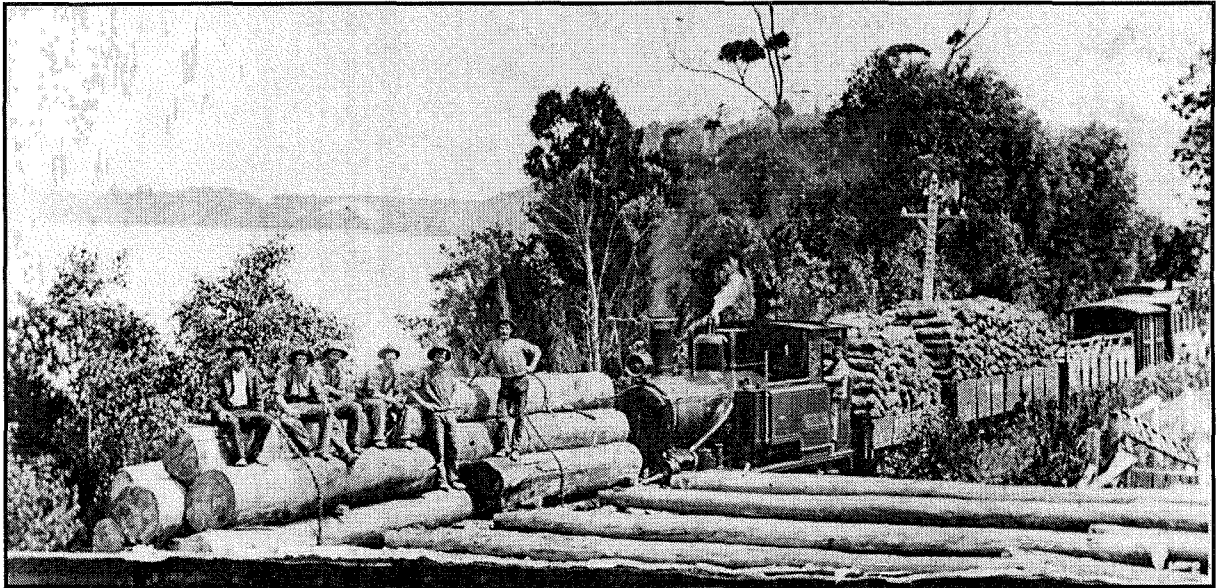
<sup>322</sup> The spelling of Lettes Bay varies and is also spelt Lett's Bay. For the purposes of this thesis I have adopted the spelling on current day maps produced by the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment.

<sup>323</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 23 November 1920.

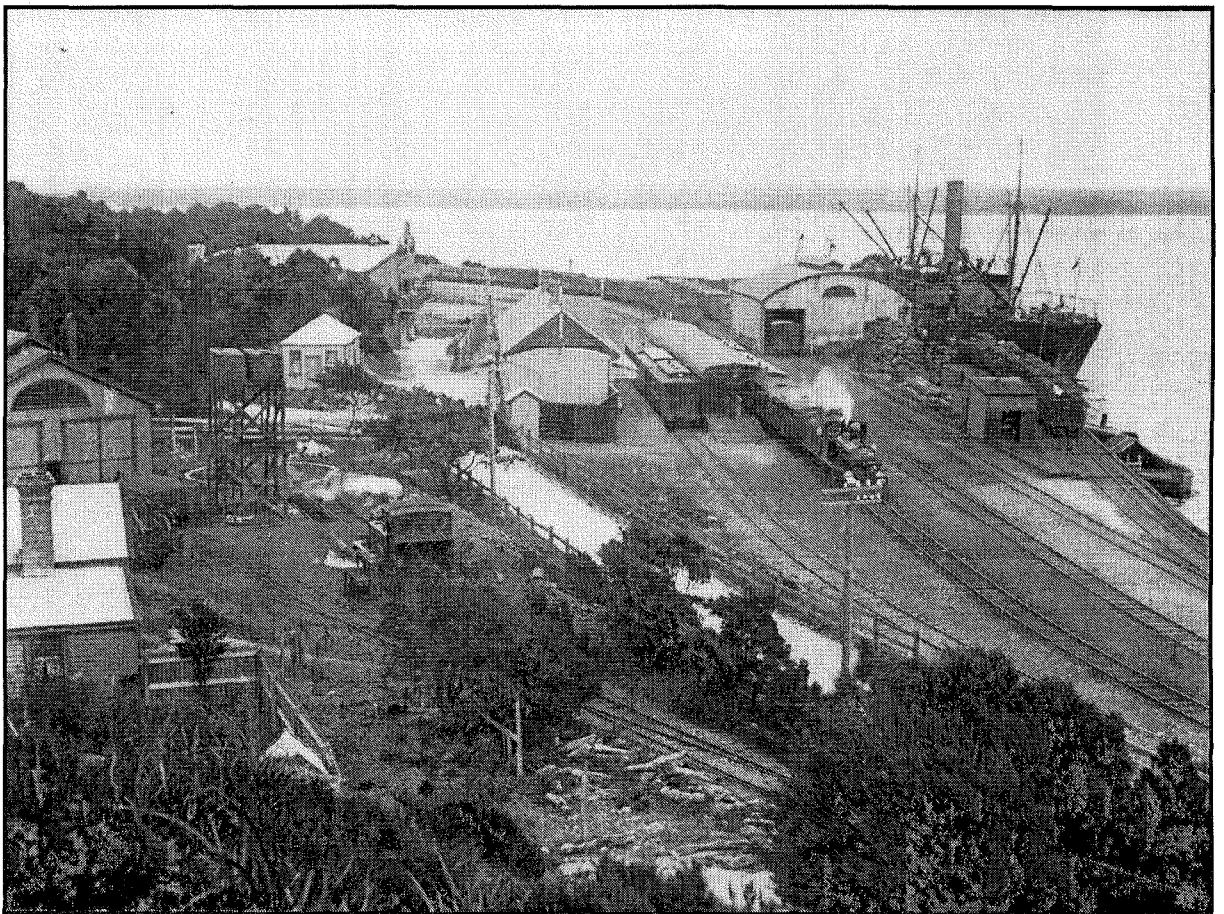
<sup>324</sup> Lette's Bay Holiday Houses, Notices and Circulars, 22 December 1920, NS 1711/445, AOT.

<sup>325</sup> List of Railway Cottages, 13 November 1900, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/316, pp. 579-580, AOT.

<sup>326</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 9 January 1899.



**LOWANA SAWMILL SIDING, ON LETTES BAY – c. 1910**



**REGATTA POINT STATION – c. 1935**

## Strahan and the Outlying Rural Districts

Strahan long depended upon the West Coast mines for its prosperity, but all this would change as other entities lured freight away from the Strahan wharves. This section looks at the diversification of activities forced upon the ailing town, some successful, others abject failures.

The Zeehan and Dundas areas generated most of the activity through the port of Strahan during the early 1890s. It was not until late 1894 that the port carried significant freight from Mount Lyell. Between 1894 and 1899 the Strahan wharves handled considerable quantities of Mount Lyell freight transshipped to and from Teepookana, as discussed in Chapter 3. By 1897 many new houses were built about the town.<sup>327</sup> The Crown benefited, selling seventy-six lots for a return of £2,450 6s.8d. in 1898, one hundred and sixty seven in 1899 (£7,332)<sup>328</sup> and eighty-four in 1900 (£2,823).<sup>329</sup> By 1901 Strahan's population had risen to 2,058.<sup>330</sup> The town was booming, John Ware noting:

Houses could not be obtained; high rents, tents, and camps were the order of the day. Not unfrequently travellers would spend the night under the shelter of the bush al-fresco style, and "waltz Matilda" in the morning to Zeehan and elsewhere, no doubt thinking meanwhile "home was never like it," Strahan at this time becoming the rendezvous for the time being of "stonebrokes" to multi-millionaires (sic), etc.<sup>331</sup>

Strahan's amenities and facilities were generally well developed. A major addition in 1900 was the two-storied Customs and Post Office building, reflecting the district's progress and prosperity.<sup>332</sup> Strahan was considered to wear 'the garb of a place that has to grow to the needs of its business. Everyone seems to have a great deal to do, and it is easy to see from a comparison of the houses with the shipping and railway, there is a future before the port of the West.'<sup>333</sup> Unfortunately for Strahan, the Government's decision to permit a second railway into Zeehan reduced port activity. Much of the traffic was now diverted through to Burnie. Within a year of the December 1900 opening of the Emu Bay Railway, Strahan had slid into decline. The *Zeehan &*

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<sup>327</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 December 1897.

<sup>328</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900, 1900, paper 44, p. 30.

<sup>329</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901, 1901, paper 47, p. 23.

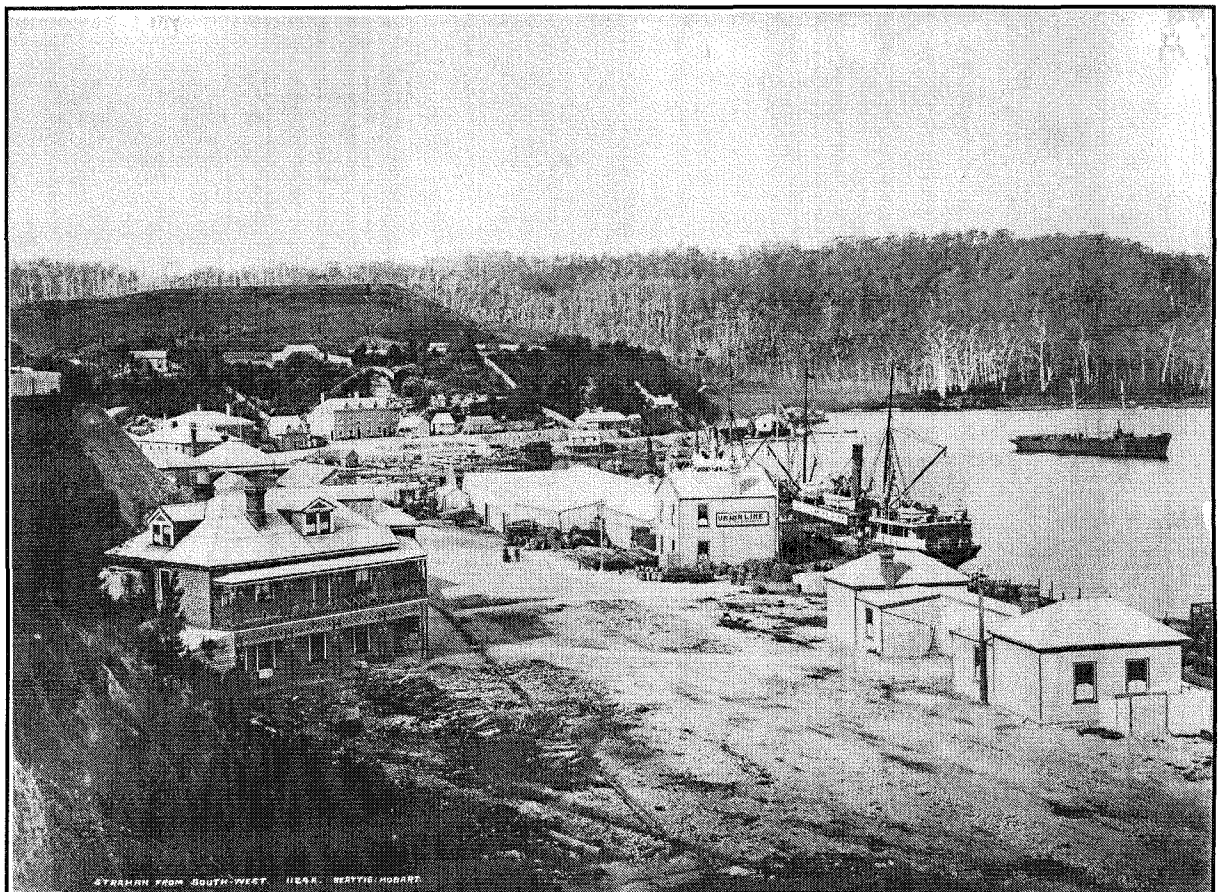
<sup>330</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1899, 1900, paper 67, p. 92.

<sup>331</sup> J Ware, *Strahan: Macquarie Harbour*, Facsimile of 1908 edition, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneer's Memorial Museum, 1981, p. 18.

<sup>332</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 11 September 1900.

<sup>333</sup> *The Banner*, 12 September 1900.





STRAHAN FORESHORE – c.1900



PALACE HOTEL, STRAHAN, VENUE FOR CELEBRATIONS MARCH 1897

*Dundas Herald* noted 'business at Strahan is very quiet...many of the empty dwellings are likely to remain so for some time to come.'<sup>334</sup>

The Mount Lyell Company's increasing control over the Lyell copper field deepened Strahan's woes. Following its takeover of the North Mount Lyell operations in May 1903 the Company effectively closed down the port at Kelly Basin and diverted much of the Lyell trade through Regatta Point. No longer the focal port for the West Coast mineral trade, Strahan slowly diversified into other industries. Timber, fishing, farming and tourism opportunities were developed. On-going demand for Huon pine, Blackwood and other exotic species saw logging activities expand. Substantial sawmills were established, the milled wood being exported from Strahan.<sup>335</sup> A fishing industry developed, although in April 1902 it was allegedly threatened by the Marine Board's refusal to finance a new wharf for the fishermen.<sup>336</sup> By 1908 the fishing fleet numbered twenty boats and trade amounted to £3,000 annually.<sup>337</sup> The excellent fishing grounds along the West Coast gained popularity and in 1916 Strahan stood to benefit as it was the only safe harbour. Moves were afoot to expand the industry.<sup>338</sup>

Farming opportunities expanded. A small fruit farm at Opah, on the northern outskirts of Strahan, thrived in the fertile soil.<sup>339</sup> Agricultural records detail orcharding, small fruit growing, dairying, beef, sheep, pigs and market gardening. Honey was also important between 1918 and 1932. Strahan achieved the mantle of being the highest producer in the State in 1921.<sup>340</sup> To expand the local vegetable, orcharding, dairying and grazing activities on the fertile pockets of land, a radical pilot scheme was devised in June 1912 by the Director of Agriculture, in conjunction with the Marine Board of Strahan. The site comprised 3,000 acres of Marine Board land at Swan Basin, on the inner western neck between Macquarie Heads and Strahan. Earlier Marram grass trials on the sand dunes adjacent to the proposed trial farm had proven successful.<sup>341</sup> It was anticipated that if the Swan Basin farm succeeded then thousands of acres of similar type land, previously considered barren, could be cultivated. Fresh food could be supplied to the isolated mining towns at far cheaper prices. The population of Strahan

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<sup>334</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 January 1902.

<sup>335</sup> The history of the local timber industry and the mills of Strahan is covered in *The Huon Pine Story*, written by G Kerr and H McDermott, published in 1999 by Mainsail Books in Victoria.

<sup>336</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 25 April 1902.

<sup>337</sup> Ware, *Strahan: Macquarie Harbour*, p. 32.

<sup>338</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 29 March 1916.

<sup>339</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 20 December 1902.

<sup>340</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1920-21, 1921, paper 5, Part V.

<sup>341</sup> The Marram grass had been first planted c. 1908 by Captain Hake, the Strahan Marine Board's pilot, *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 July 1912.

would increase through farming activities and, once again, the ailing port would prove to be 'of vital importance to the whole of the West Coast.'<sup>342</sup>

The project was a gamble. It was assumed that the West Coast's rainfall would be sufficient for the cultivation of grasses, root crops and small fruits. Agricultural officers inspecting land at Swan Basin had disagreed with the prevailing opinion that the coastal land was infertile. District Surveyor, Charles Selby Wilson, predicted that the trial farm would be of educational value and have far-reaching results for the region.<sup>343</sup> During the first year of farming operations a large area of sandy land was planted to grass and an eleven acre section was cleared and prepared ready for crops.<sup>344</sup> Inspecting the early works in June 1913, the Director of Agriculture, Mr AH Benson advised that he had 'practically decided to put five acres in potatoes this season.'<sup>345</sup>

Apart from planting normal crops and grasses, it was intended to introduce several new species to the region, including flax from New Zealand and pine trees.<sup>346</sup> The flax was planted north of Strahan, near the Henty River, but the exercise proved unsuccessful.<sup>347</sup> The irregular rainfall and poor soil at Swan Basin combined to deny the anticipated results. The Swan Basin experimental farm proved an abject failure. The once confident Wilson fell silent. In March 1916 the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* advised that the Agricultural Department had given notice to the Marine Board to the effect it was winding up its farming operations at Swan Basin.<sup>348</sup>

Having dismissed cropping and grazing, it was thought that the conditions would prove ideal for pine plantations.<sup>349</sup> A test trial of eight acres of *Pinus insignis* was planted during 1922 in the Henty River region.<sup>350</sup> The Forestry Department established a nursery and pine plantation at Lake Koonya, about a mile to the north west of Strahan. The nursery supplied a variety of pine seedlings, including the *Pinus insignis* that were planted by returned soldiers on a nearby fourteen and a half acre plot.<sup>351</sup> During 1924 the Conservator of Forests, LG Irby, approached the Mount Lyell Company to participate in the co-development of a softwood plantation near Queenstown. The

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<sup>342</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 3 June 1912.

<sup>343</sup> JPPP, Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1911-12, paper 20, p. 20.

<sup>344</sup> JPPP, Financial Statement of the Treasurer of Tasmania and Statement of the Minister of Railways and Minister of Agriculture, 1913-14, paper 14, p. 23.

<sup>345</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 28 June 1913.

<sup>346</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 2 June 1915.

<sup>347</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 25 June 1920.

<sup>348</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 10 March 1916.

<sup>349</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 31 August 1921.

<sup>350</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1922, paper 27, p. 9.

<sup>351</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1924, paper 31, pp. 7-8.

Company's Board refused the request.<sup>352</sup> The Forestry Department's propagation nursery at Lake Koonya proved successful. The local plantation was expanded to 179 acres. New plantings were established about the Queenstown area at Conglomerate Creek, Roaring Meg Creek and near the town's reservoir.<sup>353</sup> Forestry experimentation was not limited to growing pine trees. Three trial distillation plants were developed, one at the King River and two at Strahan to recover Huon pine oil. The processing of the highly aromatic oil did not prove efficient and was quickly abandoned.<sup>354</sup>

Pine plantations met with mixed success. The *Pinus insignis* sown at Lake Koonya did not thrive and was replaced with *Pinus pinaster*. Many trees planted about the Lyell district struggled, particularly those subjected to furnace fumes. The Oregon pine plantings established in the valley areas generally succeeded. The trial plantation along the old Linda track in 1926, which comprised a variety of pines, languished amidst the indigenous scrub.<sup>355</sup> After eleven years of trials about the Strahan and Queenstown areas, the next Conservator of Forests, SW Steane, acknowledged that further soil analysis and experimentation with the tree varieties was required prior to any further plantings on the West Coast. Steane considered 'the real risk in planting untried types of country lies in a false sense of security induced by apparent success in the early stages.'<sup>356</sup>

Strahan developed as a holiday destination for the inland mining communities. The annual mining picnics and railway excursions from Zeehan and Mount Lyell were well attended. The beach, boat trips and general aquatic activities were enjoyed by the miners and their families from as far afield as Rosebery, Tullah, Zeehan and Mount Lyell. Strahan also benefited from the activities of the West Coast (1907) and Mount Lyell (1908) Tourist Associations. John Ware, writing in 1908, considered Strahan to be 'the Gem of the West, being possessed of unsurpassed scenery and pleasure resorts, marine and otherwise, and should in the future attract and be largely patronised by Tourists and others.'<sup>357</sup>

Strahan achieved municipal status on 20 August 1907.<sup>358</sup> However, its population continued to decline. The April 1911 Census revealed a total 1,011 permanent residents,<sup>359</sup> falling to 670 in 1935.<sup>360</sup> In 1923 Whitham described the town as 'a

<sup>352</sup> R Murray to LG Irby, 16 October 1924, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/681, p. 237, AOT.

<sup>353</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1926, paper 25, p. 10.

<sup>354</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1928, paper 40, p. 6.

<sup>355</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1929, paper 38, pp. 8-9.

<sup>356</sup> JPPP, Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 1932, paper 25, p. 5.

<sup>357</sup> Ware, *Strahan: Macquarie Harbour*, p. 26.

<sup>358</sup> *Tasmanian Government Gazette*, 27 August 1907, pp. 944-945.

<sup>359</sup> JPPP, Statistics for the Year 1910-11, 1911, paper 28, p. 91.

pleasant little place,' and it was the holiday resort for people from Lyell.<sup>361</sup> Strahan did not enjoy the same civic and social welfare benefits conferred on its mining towns by the Mount Lyell Company. It was not until November 1935 that the Strahan Council considered applying for the connection to the State Hydro-electric grid.<sup>362</sup> Road access to the town was delayed until 30 October 1937.<sup>363</sup>

## Conclusions

From the outset of its building activities in 1894 the Mount Lyell Company had not sought to dominate the residential and mining settlements in the region. Its early efforts were concentrated on the erection of its smelters and improving access into the Lyell district. Construction of the railway was a priority.<sup>364</sup> Upon his arrival, Sticht realised that uncontrolled residential development by squatters about the smelters site would be detrimental to his Company's proposed operations and future expansion plans. With the government's decision to survey a new smelters town further down the Queen River Valley, Sticht took an active interest in the formation of a Progress Committee, becoming its inaugural president. His motives were twofold; to facilitate the removal of the squatters from Penghana to the new town and to 'take an active part for the interests of the Co. in questions shared with the community growing up under its patronage.'<sup>365</sup>

Assisted by his senior professional staff, Sticht adopted a strong interest in Queenstown, ensuring its general development was placed on a firm footing.<sup>366</sup> He considered the town to be 'the most important camp on the West Coast!'<sup>367</sup> Under the Company's guidance, Queenstown displaced Zeehan as the most modern and progressive settlement on the West Coast.<sup>368</sup> Through the implementation of effective management strategies and its welfare initiatives, as discussed in Chapter 6, the Company dominated the communities about the Lyell region. It fostered growth in its preferred towns and was fully prepared to enforce the closure of others. The Company could be decisive when the situation warranted, as shown by the closure of the North Mount Lyell operations, and demonstrated compassion when the need arose. For

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<sup>360</sup> JPPP, Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1935-36, 1937, paper 48, p. 19.

<sup>361</sup> Whitham, *Western Tasmania – A Land of Riches and Beauty*, p. 67.

<sup>362</sup> R Murray letter to Strahan Council Clerk, 1 November 1935, Letterbook to Government, NS 1711/688, p. 155, AOT.

<sup>363</sup> *Advocate*, 1 November 1937.

<sup>364</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 15 November 1894.

<sup>365</sup> R Sticht letter to Chairman and Board of Directors, 2 August 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 159, AOT.

<sup>366</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 13 July 1895.

<sup>367</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 26 June 1895, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/309, p. 63, AOT.

example, Murray's handling of the Company's withdrawal from Linda was socially responsible.

Elsewhere on the West Coast no other Company wielded similar power during the era covered by this thesis. In the Zeehan and Dundas districts there was no single dominant entity, the townships being centrally located to serve the surrounding mines.<sup>369</sup> The Electrolytic Zinc Company dominated the town of Rosebery, but only after the Depression years. Historian Geof Jay comments 'as the mine grew and developed so did the town. Increased production meant an increased workforce, which in turn meant more accommodation was required.'<sup>370</sup> Just to the north east of Rosebery was the small mining community of Tullah. With a maximum population of 400, the town totally relied on one long-term mining operation for its future. Glyn Roberts confirmed 'the life of the town was tied irrevocably to the fortunes of the North Mount Farrell mine.'<sup>371</sup> The remaining major settlement was Waratah and, according to Margery Godfrey, for seventy-five years (1871-1946) it 'echoed the history of the Mt Bischoff Mine and the small mines around it.'<sup>372</sup>

The extent of the Mount Lyell Company's domination is unparalleled in Tasmania's mining history. After the 1903 amalgamation Sticht controlled two railways, two smelters, two substantial ports and the destinies of no less than eight towns,<sup>373</sup> together with several smaller settlements along its railway. Upon acquiring the Tasman and Crown Lyell lease in 1933 the Company had assumed total control of the Mount Lyell field.<sup>374</sup> The Company's domination of the towns within the region and the mining returns for Tasmania continued well after the period covered by this thesis. In 1935 the Minister for Mines, Thomas Davies, commented 'the production of copper is the State's most important branch of mining, and is confined solely to the activities of the Mt Lyell Company.'<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 December 1907.

<sup>369</sup> W Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania*, Zeehan, Evershed Bros., 1891, pp. 27-28, & 40-41.

<sup>370</sup> WG Jay, *In the Shadow of Murchison – Rosebery 1893-1993*, Smithton, WG Jay, 1993, p. 59.

<sup>371</sup> G Roberts, 'Tullah (Mount Farrell) – Life in a small mining village – 1898 to 1914', *THRA*, Volume 46, no. 4, December 1999, pp. 191-192.

<sup>372</sup> M Godfrey, *Waratah – Pioneer of the West*, Waratah, Municipality of Waratah, 1984, p. 84.

<sup>373</sup> The towns included Pillinger, Darwin, Crotty, Linda, North Lyell, Gormanston, Queenstown and Regatta Point.

<sup>374</sup> Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 194.

<sup>375</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1935, 1935, paper 31.

## CONCLUSION

On the 1 November 1899 opening of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company's line through to Strahan the phrase "We find a way, or make it" was prominently displayed aboard the Abt locomotive. The expression was considered truly emblematical of the honest labor which, aided by capital, had brought about the methodical development of one of the world's best mines.<sup>1</sup> It epitomised the spirit of the early prospectors who had explored and opened up the country, the considerable labours of the hardy workers and settlers and the contribution of the Company's astute management team that nurtured innovative practices within the isolated confines of the Lyell region. Through these concerted efforts the Company quickly rose to a position of dominance over all it surveyed. The motto also emphasises the key themes of this thesis: exploration, isolation, innovation and domination.

Visits to the Tasmanian West Coast in the early years of white settlement were limited, its gale swept coastline deterring seaward approach and the inland barrier of mountains, rivers and dense vegetation preventing overland exploration. James Kelly is credited with the discovery of Macquarie Harbour in late December 1816.<sup>2</sup> It was within the harbour precincts and along the shores of the Gordon River that he located large stands of Huon pine, a most prized timber for boat building purposes. Instead of facilitating further exploration and the exploitation of the valuable resource, Lieutenant-Governor Sorell refused applications for development, preferring to utilise Sarah Island and the harbour environs for use as a penal institution. The region's sheer isolation and surrounding mountainous topography rendered the area a natural gaol.<sup>3</sup> Upon settlement in 1822, and despite the considerable negativity arising from the claims of 'inexpressible depravity, degradation and woe,'<sup>4</sup> there was ample evidence of the island's inhabitants adapting to the harsh climate and developing innovative practices during the eleven years of occupation. Land was cultivated,<sup>5</sup> a considerable number of boats were built,<sup>6</sup> a semaphore communication system established<sup>7</sup> and, amongst many

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<sup>1</sup> *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 3 November 1899.

<sup>2</sup> A full account of Kelly's trip of discovery is provided in the Legislative Council Journals (LCJ), Boat Expeditions round Tasmania 1815-16 and 1824, 1881, paper 75.

<sup>3</sup> Letter Lieutenant-Governor Sorell to Under Secretary Goulburn, 12 May 1820, Historical Records of Australia (HRA), series 3, volume 3, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> J West, *The History of Tasmania*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1981 reprint of the 1852 publication, p.395.

<sup>5</sup> H Julen, *The Penal Settlement of Macquarie Harbour*, Launceston, Regal Publications, 1988, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> G Kerr & H McDermott, *The Huon Pine Story – A history of harvest and use of a unique timber*, Victoria, Mainsail Books, 1999, pp. 10-11.

other activities, a tannery and shoe making enterprise flourished.<sup>8</sup> The occupation at Sarah Island proved a portent for future settlements about the region.

This study has detailed the adversities of exploration about the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region, none better highlighted than by Charles Gould's second expedition into the western frontier in February 1862. His epic journey over the hills and through the ravines located between Mount Lyell and the shores of Macquarie Harbour, fifteen miles by straight line, took twenty-five days to complete. The eventual discovery of gold by Cornelius Lynch and Thomas Currie about the lower reaches of the Queen River in 1882 further highlighted the inherent problems of the region. Access via the King River gorge route was gruelling and potentially dangerous. Conditions on the new field were primitive and the prospectors suffered many privations within the inhospitable terrain and damp climate. Thomas Moore and George Meredith cut tracks to the goldfields the following year, opening a pathway for the eventual discovery of the Iron Blow. Development of the King River and Linda Valley goldfield proved slow, hindered by an inability to transport machinery overland from the port at Strahan. Eventually, through the considerable efforts of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company, access into the region was facilitated by the construction of its railway into Queenstown.

Despite the early rush to peg leases about Mount Lyell, large tracts of land around the outlying areas of the region had remained unexplored. The government faced concerted pressure from the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* to allocate funds to 'let the light into this *terra incognita*.'<sup>9</sup> Senior public servants supported the paper's push, with the Surveyor-General, Edward Counsel, most critical of the haphazard approach that had accompanied the selection, construction and supervision of the track-cutting programs. Government acceded to Counsel's suggestions on improving the regime. In early 1900, under the supervision of the Department of Lands and Surveys, works commenced on cutting a series of arterial pack-tracks to link with existing tracks to the West Coast. The aim of the exercise was to improve overland travel, break down the barriers between adjoining regions and to promote exploration in the outlying areas. Counsel's extensive program was completed towards the end of 1902. Unfortunately, the works did not uncover any significant mineral finds. The halcyon days of discovery

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<sup>7</sup> Austral Archaeology, *Macquarie Heads Pilot & Signal Station Conservation Plan*, Hobart, Department of Environment and Land Management, 1995, pp. 6-13.

<sup>8</sup> I Brand, *Sarah Island – Penal Settlements 1822-1833 and 1846-1847*, Launceston, Regal Press, 1990, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 18 November 1895.



about the Lyell area had passed.<sup>10</sup> With the pioneering spirit diminished, the basis of exploration changed. In a last ditch attempt to open-up new country, the government examined the agricultural, timber, mineral and tourist values along the old Great Western Railway route between Glenora and Mount Lyell. Nothing of consequence was found. The track exploration regime had failed to uncover another Mount Lyell, which proved a disappointment for all concerned. In 1919 the Premier, Walter Lee, concluded 'we have expended money on tracks, and found it thrown away.'<sup>11</sup>

Exploration within the wilds of the West Coast had been extremely difficult. Rugged mountain ranges, steep ravines, fast flowing rivers, dense vegetation, boggy button grass plains and inclement weather retarded progress and sapped the prospectors' energy. James Fenton, a pioneer settler on the North West Coast, considered that 'a few miles through the dense forests, and almost impenetrable scrubs of Western Tasmania, is more laborious than as many hundreds of miles on the open downs of the continental colonies.'<sup>12</sup> In his book *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, CJ Binks observes that 'it is probable that no comparable area of country in the world has taken so long to explore as western Tasmania.'<sup>13</sup>

From political, economic and social perspectives the effects of isolation on the inhabitants of the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region were wide-ranging. Despite enduring numerous hardships and adversities the population, and the all-dominant Mount Lyell Company, had coped and prospered. By necessity the people were tenacious and resourceful. Isolation fostered innovation and a strong sense of community identity. This thesis has identified the major issues arising from isolation and examines the methods by which they were eventually nullified. The ongoing development of transport systems, on land and over water, did much to reduce the physical effects of isolation. The two defining events identified during this history were the completion of the Mount Lyell Company's Abt railway, dubbed the civilising factor by Marion Sticht,<sup>14</sup> and the inauguration of the road service between Hobart and Queenstown on 1 September 1932. This event fully restored the lost province to Tasmania and strengthened the ties between its residents and those from other parts of Tasmania.<sup>15</sup> As observed by Blainey, the road had removed the sense of isolation for

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<sup>10</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP), Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1901-2, 1902, paper 42, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 6 March 1919.

<sup>12</sup> J Fenton, *Bushlife in Tasmania*, reprint of 1891 edition with alterations, Launceston, Mary Fisher Bookshop, undated, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> CJ Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, Launceston, Mary Fisher Bookshop, 1980, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Mount Lyell Standard*, 3 April 1897.

<sup>15</sup> *Mercury*, 1 September 1932.

those living within the Lyell region. It possibly destroyed some of the community spirit that acute isolation had bred.<sup>16</sup>

The harsh terrain and lacking amenities did not readily encourage the early development of air transport as a reliable method of communication on the West Coast. Joy rides in a Gipsy Moth proved a novelty for Strahan and Queenstown residents in mid 1931<sup>17</sup> but works on building an aerodrome at Queenstown were not commenced until 1941.<sup>18</sup>

Social and sporting activities had been promoted within the mining communities from an early stage, these events being viewed as opportunities to overcome the oppressive and secluded environments during the workers' fleeting leisure hours. The annual picnics were actively promoted by the Company and became an institution. Patriotic marches, street parades and formal ceremonies were well attended, Solomon offering the opinion that crowd involvement was possibly a phenomenon arising from isolation.<sup>19</sup> Blainey contends that 'isolation bred a camaraderie and rough loyalty.'<sup>20</sup> The Mount Lyell Company's innovative welfare policies had done much to ease the effects of the wet and cold climate and minimise isolation by ensuring services and amenities in the Lyell area were of a high standard. Health, education and low-cost housing became a priority. Electric power was supplied at cheap rates to the community and the Company's shops sold meat, food items and general merchandise at prices comparable to those in the capital cities.<sup>21</sup>

There were instances where individuals and companies manipulated the isolated nature of the region for their own advantage. Claim jumping was rife in the early years around the far-flung mining fields. Squatters were able to claim prime areas within the new settlements, well before authorities were cognisant of the problem. High profile identities Edward Miles and James Crotty both manipulated the deficient communication systems to orchestrate advantageous outcomes, albeit only temporarily as far as Miles was concerned. The North Mount Lyell Copper Company had to be closely monitored in many aspects of its operations as its management often failed to meet compliance requirements. The Mount Lyell Company was also guilty of

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<sup>16</sup> G Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Hobart, St. David's Park Publishing, 1993, p. 279.

<sup>17</sup> R Murray to Company Secretary, 7 July 1931, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/353, pp. 233-234, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT).

<sup>18</sup> *Advocate*, 7 March 1941.

<sup>19</sup> RJ Solomon, *The Richest Lode – Broken Hill 1883-1988*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> G Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex – The Story of Mount Isa Mines*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1962, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 27 August 1920, Head Office General Letterbook, Non State Records (NS) 1711/338, p. 76, AOT.

deliberate breaches of lease conditions. In one instance Sticht was aware his timbercutters had been felling trees outside the prescribed areas yet the activity was continued up until the Government became aware and intervened to end to the practice.<sup>22</sup> The Company also released slag into the Queen River without notification.<sup>23</sup> Isolation bred contempt towards a distant authority. Binks notes that 'there was a recognition almost from the beginning that west coasters were a people apart, who had to fight for whatever they needed in a world which tended very easily to forget their existence.'<sup>24</sup>

Each chapter has identified a number of innovative practices and processes that contributed in varying degrees to the success and wellbeing of the region and its communities, the Mount Lyell Company, the greater West Coast and Tasmania. With respect to mining, Robert Sticht's perfection of the pyritic smelting process on 13 November 1902 was recognised internationally.<sup>25</sup> Other innovative processes at Mount Lyell included the development of the flotation process (1914), electrolytic refining (1928) and the practice of large-scale mining of the Company's low-grade ores. The mining and processing operations had been facilitated by the development of the Lake Margaret power scheme in 1914 and 1931, and the completion of the North Lyell tunnel and underground electric railway system in 1928. This innovative development reduced transport costs and opened up access to new ore bodies. Under the capable management of Russell Murray, the Company had become an efficient and profitable operation. It had been for sometime the sole copper producer in Australia, surviving low copper prices and the Depression years, to dominate Tasmania's mineral outputs.<sup>26</sup>

The implementation of an efficient and reliable transport system, capable of handling the difficult wilderness terrain, was compulsory as a cornerstone foundation for the success of the Mount Lyell Company's operations. The Abt Railway, the first of its kind in Australasia, provided the innovative answer. Instead of employing the conventional philosophy of tunnelling through and detouring around obstacles, the Company chose the shortest route, utilising the rack rail system over the steep 1 in 16 grades. Lightweight wooden trestle bridges were employed to span the deep gullies and skirt around areas of poor stability, avoiding the ongoing landslips that plagued the conventionally built North Mount Lyell railway. The railway's ongoing success can be gauged by the significant profits generated and its ability to compete against road traffic

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<sup>22</sup> R Sticht to NJ Brown, 30 December 1999, Head Office General Letterbook, NS, p. 246, AOT.

<sup>23</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 22 February 1904.

<sup>24</sup> CJ Binks, *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*, Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1988, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 11 May 1905.

<sup>26</sup> The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited (MLMRC), Report of Annual Meeting held 13 December 1935, Queenstown.

until its closure in 1963, after sixty-seven years of continuous operation. The Company also employed narrow gauge tramways, aerial cableways and inclined haulages to great effect about the region. These systems carried considerable freight and relieved the isolation for many of the small bush camps and outlying settlements. Innovation was a key component to the maintenance of the Company's transport systems, its Queenstown workshops overhauling engines and rolling stock, manufacturing boilers, building passenger and freight waggons and an electric locomotive.<sup>27</sup>

The Company pioneered the design and construction of an efficient system of wooden flumes, utilising the excess rainwater to transport timber from the otherwise inaccessible ridges and gullies.<sup>28</sup> Of considerable importance to the region was the provision of a safe and efficient port within Macquarie Harbour. Although Napier Bell's innovative harbour improvement scheme was only partially implemented, the effects of the western breakwater and inner training wall were immediate. The depth of water over the sandbar increased from eight feet six inches to sixteen feet. Cargo capacity was increased from 250 tons for conventional ships to over 800 tons.<sup>29</sup>

Following the implementation of the Company's social welfare regime in 1913, lifestyles and living conditions were enhanced about the Lyell area. Prompted by the 12 October 1912 disaster at the North Mount Lyell mine, the Mount Lyell Company became the first Tasmanian industrial establishment to commit to welfare improvements, five years ahead of the Electrolytic Zinc Company's Cooperative Council at Risdon. The benefits were significant. The Company enjoyed increased outputs in production and improved worker loyalty while the employees enjoyed residing within the 'cheapest living locality in the Commonwealth.'<sup>30</sup> The Company fostered innovation in the home through the supply of domestic electricity for lighting and power, to the extent the Melbourne *Herald* believed Queenstown to be 'the best equipped electrical town in all Australia.'<sup>31</sup> Improved working conditions, modern amenities and a decrease in the cost of living were a direct result of the Company's welfare scheme. Improvements to public and social amenities were implemented, with a high emphasis on the hospital, schools and recreational establishments.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> R Sticht letter to the Chairman and Board of Directors, 9 October 1903, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/319, p. 193, AOT.

<sup>28</sup> *Zeehan & Dundas Herald*, 21 June 1910.

<sup>29</sup> R Sticht letter to Company Secretary, 4 September 1902, Head Office General Letterbook, NS 1711/318, p. 106, AOT.

<sup>30</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1920, p. 33, Queenstown.

<sup>31</sup> Melbourne *Herald*, 16 February 1926.

<sup>32</sup> *Advocate*, 11 March 1926.

By conquering the environmental challenges and implementing innovative systems, helped by a certain amount of cunning by its management regime, the Company had risen to a position of domination. In 1933, following the acquisition of the Tasman and Crown Lyell lease, the Company controlled all mining within the Mount Lyell precincts.<sup>33</sup> It dominated transport arrangements about the field and maintained a ready access through the ports of Regatta Point and Burnie, ensuring competitive charges for the large volume of freight it exported and imported. Through the provision of an all-encompassing welfare scheme the Company had achieved a compliant and loyal workforce. By 1935 the Company dominated all it surveyed.

The Company had effectively sustained the trade and industry activity within the region since 1893. The importance of the Mount Lyell operations transcended through to the general wellbeing of the Tasmanian economy. The impact and scale of mining operations at Mount Lyell had dramatically increased over the years. In the first full year of operations (1/4/1897-31/3/1898) the Mount Lyell mine (Iron Blow) produced 107,440 tons of ore to yield 5,257 tons of copper, 472,556 ounces of silver and 24,140 ounces of gold.<sup>34</sup> In the financial year ending 30 September 1935 the Company employed on average 1,700 men and paid £394,000 in wages. During the year 580,898 tons of ore was mined to produce 13,966 tons of copper, 142,642 ounces of silver, 7,532 ounces of gold and 26,399 tons of pyritic concentrates for acid and fertiliser production.<sup>35</sup> The copper was valued at £464,007, the silver and gold at £77,513, which amounted to £541,520, or 39 per cent of Tasmania's total mineral production for the year. The Secretary for Mines noted the improvement in mineral production in the State and credited the Mount Lyell Company as being chiefly responsible for the result.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Davies, the Minister for Mines, acknowledged the Mount Lyell Company was the most important mining entity in the State, stating 'the progressive policy adopted by the Company, even during the lowest ebb in the market for copper, augurs well for the future of the industry.'<sup>37</sup>

From its inception in 1893, through to 31 December 1935, the Company produced 290,058 tons of copper, 14,821,263 ounces of silver, 423,650 ounces of gold and had

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<sup>33</sup> Blainey, *Peaks of Lyell*, p. 194.

<sup>34</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Half-years ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1897 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 1898, Queenstown.

<sup>35</sup> MLMRC Reports and Statements of Account for the Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1935, Queenstown.

<sup>36</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines 1935, 1936, paper 5, p. 5. It should be noted that as the pyrites was considered a by-product it was given a nominal value of £1 per ton. Its value would have been considerably more as it negated the need for the Company to import native sulphur from foreign countries for its mainland fertiliser plants, refer JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1936, paper 25, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> JPPP, Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1935, paper 31, p. 4.

paid £5,329,069 in dividends. Over this period the average copper content of the ore had fallen from 4.40 per cent to 2.37 per cent. Between 1896 and 1935 the total worth of the copper amounted to £21,560,815, this figure excluding gold, silver and pyritic concentrates. This amount easily surpassed the statewide figures for tin, once the Island's glamour metal, its total export earnings amounting to £17,000,390 for the period 1880 to 1935.<sup>38</sup>

At the time the impacts of pollution were not given priority in a region built around industrial exploitation. Large tracts of pristine wilderness had been despoiled in varying degrees by the prospectors, settlers, timber cutters and industrialists. Lloyd Robson observes:

The mining bonanza on the wild west coast of Tasmania cut the terrain to pieces and caused one of the greatest disfigurements and pollution of air and landscape in the world. Hillsides were laid bare by fire and fumes and the hand of man. On clear days passengers on ships sailing into Macquarie Harbour could see the pall of sulphur fumes from the ten or eleven large furnaces at Queenstown from 15 or 20 miles away. It smelt of money.<sup>39</sup>

Blainey's authoritative work *Peaks of Lyell* tells a story of the mountains and mines and the 'men who found them, floated them, worked them, and died in them.'<sup>40</sup> This history differs from that written by Blainey, particularly chapters 3 to 7, as it examines the issues of transport infrastructure, survival within the hostile environment and the urbanisation of the region. It does not seek to sensationalise events but to provide a broad and balanced perspective of the Lyell area based upon the key themes of exploration, isolation, innovation and domination. For practical reasons, it has not been possible to cover all aspects of the region's colourful history occurring between 1859 and 1935. Areas of interest that warrant greater discussion include family life, health and temperance issues, religion and education, the white-Australia policy, the impact of various immigration regimes within the isolated mining communities, political activists, farming activities and the many small timber-cutting communities scattered throughout the region. There is still a rich history to be told of the Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour region.

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<sup>38</sup> JPPP, Report of the Secretary of Mines 1935, 1936, paper 5, pp. 10 & 15, and JPPP, Report of the Secretary for Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1919, 1920, paper 5, p. 16 for copper figures 1896-1918.

<sup>39</sup> L Robson, *A History of Tasmania – Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 197.

<sup>40</sup> Blainey, *Peaks of Lyell*, p. v.

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<b>INDEX</b>		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>PRIMARY SOURCES</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>MANUSCRIPTS</b>	
1.1	Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT)	401
1.2	Galley Museum, Queenstown	401
1.3	Mitchell Library, Sydney	401
1.4	University of Melbourne Archives	401
1.5	West Coast Heritage Authority Inc. – Queenstown	402
1.6	Zeehan Pioneers Museum (West Coast Heritage Authority Inc.)	402
1.7	British Library, London	402
1.8	Guildhall Library, London	402
1.9	Leeds Industrial Museum, Leeds	402
1.10	Mining Journal Ltd, London	402
1.11	Mitchell Library, Glasgow	402
 <b>2</b>	 <b>PUBLICATIONS</b>	
2.1	General	403
2.2	Official	403
2.3	Tasmanian Parliament	403
2.4	Mines Department	411
2.5	Zeehan School of Mines and Metallurgy	411
2.6	Government Maps	411
2.7	Newspapers and Periodicals	411
2.8	Books	412
2.9	Articles	412
2.10	Unpublished Reports	412
2.11	Unpublished Thesis	412
<b>SECONDARY SOURCES</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>PUBLICATIONS</b>	
1.1	Government Maps	413
1.2	Newspapers	413
1.3	Books and Articles	413
1.4	Unpublished Reports	416
1.5	Unpublished Thesis	417

## **PRIMARY SOURCES**

### **1 MANUSCRIPTS**

#### **A AUSTRALIA**

##### **1.1 Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT)**

###### **Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Records**

NS 726/5, 9, 17	General Mount Lyell Records, including railway, general reports and welfare issues.
NS 1711 Series	Records transferred to Archives in 1995 following closure of Mount Lyell Company operations at Queenstown.
NS 1711/35-62	Correspondence General Manager (1904-34)
NS 1711/251-256	Letterbook of Engineer-in-Charge (1904-21)
NS 1711/269	Half-yearly Reports of Engineer-in-Charge (1914-23)
NS 1711/281	Periodic Reports of Engineer-in-Charge (1902-04)
NS 1711/309-360	Head Office Letterbook (1895-1937)
NS 1711/445	Notices and Circulars (1901-22)
NS 1711/546	Letterbook Company Welfare (1920-21)
NS 1711/553-559	Staff Letters (1912-30)
NS 1711/677-688	Letterbook to Government (1915-36)
NS 1711/847	Railway Department Letterbook (1911-14)
NS 1711/854	Report ED Peters (1893)

##### **1.2 Galley Museum, Queenstown**

###### **Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Records**

Abt Railway Survey Plans.

##### **1.3 Mitchell Library, Sydney**

EC Driffield Photographic Collection

##### **1.4 University of Melbourne Archives**

(Material transferred from Mount Lyell Company's Melbourne Offices in 1968)

###### **Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Records**

2/3/11	Minutes of Meetings 1924-1926
5/1/2, 3 & 5	General Manager's Correspondence 1912-1914
5/2/1-3	General Manager's Confidential Letters 1900-1907
5/3	General Manager's General Letters 1903-1911
5/5	General Manager's Railway Letters 1903-1911



## **1.5 West Coast Heritage Authority Inc. - Queenstown**

### **Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Records**

Half-yearly Reports and Balance Sheets 1 April 1893 – 31 March 1917.

Annual Reports and Balance Sheets 1 October 1916 – 31 March 1936.

North Mount Lyell Copper Company Records, including Minute Book of the, 6 February 1898 to 26 November 1900.

### **North Mount Lyell Copper Company Records**

Reports and Statements of Accounts for the period 1898-1901

## **1.6 Zeehan Pioneers Museum (West Coast Heritage Authority Inc.)**

Photographic collection – West Coast Area

Mine reports and general West Coast information, including Tasmanian Government

Railway operating records.

## **B OVERSEAS**

### **1.7 British Library, London**

*British Australasian* mining journal: Articles on the Mount Lyell Field, 1897-1903.

### **1.8 Guildhall Library, London**

English Company Records, including the Emu Bay and Mount Bischoff Railway Company and the North Mount Lyell Copper Company Annual Reports.

### **1.9 Leeds Industrial Museum, Leeds**

North Mount Lyell Copper Company locomotive records.

### **1.10 Mining Journal Ltd, London**

*The Mining Journal, Railway, and Commercial Gazette* – Mount Lyell Field, 1897-1903.

### **1.11 Mitchell Library, Glasgow**

Railway records and photographs – Mount Lyell locomotives: Dubs and Co. and North British Locomotive Co.

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### 2.1 General

Historical Records of Australia, Series 3, Volumes 2 & 3

### 2.2 Official

*Hobart Gazette*

*Tasmanian Government Gazette*

### 2.3 Tasmanian Parliament

#### House of Assembly Journals (HAJ) 1860-1884

Year	Paper	Title
1860	4	Exploration of the Western Country – Mr Gould’s Report
1862		Votes and Proceedings, Friday 24 January 1862, Discussions on Bill 61
1862	26	Macquarie Harbour – Report of the Government Geologist
1858	95	Minerals on the North Coast – Letter from Mr. Allport to the Hon. Colonial Secretary
1876	104	Exploration in Western Country – Letter of the Hon. JR Scott, MLC, to the Minister of Lands and Works
1877	27	Western Country: Reports by the Hon JR Scott and Mr CP Sprent
1878	47	West Coast – Mr Surveyor Counsel’s Report on Track from Lake St Clair to the Pieman River
1878	48	West Coast – Mr Surveyor Frodsham’s Report on Track from Florentine River Westward across the Gordon River towards Macquarie Harbour
1878	51	West Coast – Mr Sprent’s Report on its Mineral Resources
1881		Votes and Proceedings, Tuesday 9 August 1881, appointment of Select Committee
1881		Votes and Proceedings, Wednesday 2 November 1881, West Coast Steam Company
1881	87	Steam Communication with West Coast: Petition
1881	91	Mineral Resources, West Coast: Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, and Evidence
1881	106	Territorial Police: Inspector’s Report, 1880-1881
1881	121	Macquarie Harbour and Trial Boat Harbour: Reports by Mr CP Sprent
1881	131	Proposed West Coast Steamboat and Tramway Company: Correspondence relating to Terms and Conditions of Concessions to be Granted, 1881
1882	79	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief
1882	99	Strahan to Heemskirk Tramway: Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix,
1882	104	District Surveyors’ Reports

1883	34	Territorial Police: Inspector's Report
1883	56	Exploration – Mr TB Moore's report upon the country between Lake St Clair and Macquarie Harbour
1883	59	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-In-Chief, 1883
1883	127	West Coast: Report of Engineer of Roads upon all the works executed under Overseer Clay's superintendence
1883	144	Comparison of Cost of Transit by Railways and by Roads
1884	1	Statistics of Tasmania 1883
1884	40	Marine Survey of the Coast of Tasmania: Correspondence
1884	70	The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines
1884	57	Mining Districts: Return of Amounts received from Mining Districts during the Years 1881, 1882, and 1883, and of Amounts expended on Roads, Bridges, &c. in those Districts for the same period
1884	58	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief
1884	70	The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Paper</b>	<b>Title</b>
1861	16	Survey Office Reports. Rough Notes of a Journal of Expedition to the Westward in 1832
1863	1A	Western Country - Report of the Government Geologist
1881	75	Boat Expeditions round Tasmania 1815-16 and 1824
1881	77	West Coast: Progress Reports on Mines by Mr G Thureau

#### **Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament (JPPP) 1885-1936**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Paper</b>	<b>Title</b>
1885	1	Statistics of Tasmania 1884
1885	56	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief
1885	58	The Mines Office, and the Mining Industry: Report of the Secretary of Mines
1885	59	Report of Inspector of Mines for 1884
1885	129	King River and Mount Lyell Gold Fields: Report by Mr Commissioner Glover
1886	1	Statistics of Tasmania 1885
1886	66	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, (including Report of Engineer of Roads)
1886	71	Report of the Secretary of Mines 1885
1886	146	The Linda Goldfield: Its Auriferous and Other Mineral Deposits – Report by G Thureau
1887	2	Statistics of Tasmania 1886
1887	55	Public Works, Report of the Engineer-in-Chief (including Reports of Engineer of Roads and Architect)

1887	58	Ouse to Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour: Report by Deputy-Surveyor General
1887	127	Public-House on Esplanade at Strahan: Correspondence
1888	2	Statistics of Tasmania 1887
1888	45	Public Works: Report of the Engineer-in-Chief, (Including Reports of Engineer of Roads and Government Architect)
1888	47	Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1887-8
1888	97	Mount Zeehan Tramway: Correspondence and Other Papers, 1888
1888	144	Mount Zeehan Silver and Argentiiferous Lead Lodes and Other Ore Deposits: Report by Mr G Thureau
1889	61	District Surveyors: Reports for 1888
1889	81	Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1888-89: (Including Inspector of Mines Report)
1889	103	Statistics of Tasmania 1888
1890	34	Strahan and Mount Zeehan District: Report on Sanitary Condition
1890	36	Territorial Police: Inspector's Report for the Year 1889
1890	61	Entrance to Macquarie Harbour: Report by C Napier Bell
1890	64	Report of the Secretary of Mines, for 1889-90: Including Inspector of Mines' Report, 1890
1890	132	West Coast Telegraphs: Report by Superintendent of Telegraphs, 1890
1890	151	Statistics of Tasmania 1889
1891	51	Education Department, Report for 1890
1891	87	Town of Strahan: Report of Engineering Inspector
1891	116	The Lawder Harbour Improvement Bill (Private): Report from the Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices
1891	116A	Lawder Harbour Improvements: Petition from Residents of Zeehan and Strahan
1891	118	Public Works: Report of Engineer-In-Chief (Including Report of Government Architect)
1891	129	Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1890-91
1891	136	West Coast Gas and Other Works Bill, 1891, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, &c,
1891	150	Statistics of Tasmania for 1890
1892	76	Survey Department: Annual Report of the Deputy Surveyor-General
1892	78	Territorial Police: Commissioner's Report for the Year 1891, 1892
1892	119	The Mount Lyell Tramway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence
1892	124	Statistics of Tasmania 1891
1893	41	Electric Telegraph Department: Report for 1892
1893	46	Tasmanian Government Railways: Report for 1892
1893	50	Report of the Secretary of Mines for 1892-3, including a report on the Mount Lyell Mine, County of Montagu
1893	67	Census of Tasmania, 1891
1893	96	Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1893

1893	97	Road Trusts; Assessments and Contributions, 1882-1892
1893	107	Statistics of Tasmania 1892
1894	55	Tasmanian Government Railways: Mr Eddy's Report, and Appendices; with Mr Back's reply
1894	59	Mount Lyell Railway Company's Debenture Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence
1894	80	Survey Department: Annual Report of the Deputy Surveyor-General
1894	89	Statistics of Tasmania for 1893
1895	34	Finance, 1894
1895	39	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1894
1895	49	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals 1895
1896	1	The Mining Industry of Tasmania: Paper delivered by Francis Belstead, Secretary of Mines, at the Annual Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, 30 October 1895
1896	47	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1895
1896	53	Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr. George Campbell Meredith on the Track from the Navigable Waters of the Gordon River to its junction with the Serpentine River
1896	58	Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix, 1896
1896	60	Report of the Secretary for Mines for 1895-6: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines, &c.
1896	74	Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr. Surveyor Innes upon the Country between Mount Humboldt and the Head of the Navigable Water upon the River Gordon
1896	80	The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore Reduction Company's Bill, 1896, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of the Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices
1896	82	Route to the West Coast: Report of Mr Surveyor Frodsham upon the Country between the Vicinity of Mount Humboldt and the Track to the West of Mount Arrowsmith via Valley of Rasselas
1897	43	Route to the West Coast, Report of Mr Surveyor Innes upon the track from Mole Creek to Rosebery, Mount Reid
1897	48	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands for 1896
1897	49	Ports, Harbours, and Wharves: Expenditure Upon
1897	60	V.D.L. Company's Waratah and Zeehan Railway: Report of the General Manager of Railways on probable effect on the Government Railways of the Construction of the Railway from Waratah to Zeehan, with a Branch to Lyell
1897	68	The Mount Lyell and Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1897, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices

1898	2	Macquarie Harbour: Report on Proposed Works for Deepening the Bar, by C. Napier Bell
1898	34	Mount Lyell and Strahan Railway Bill, 1898, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices, 1898
1898	44	Central Board of Health: Report for the Year 1897
1898	46	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals 1898-9
1898	56	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands
1898	66	The Great Midland Railway and West Coast Railway Bill, (Private): Report of the General Manager, Tasmanian Government Railways, 1898
1898	68	Statistics for the Year 1897
1898	70	Road Trusts; Assessments and Contributions, 1893-1897
1899	25	Road Districts and Town Boards: Return of Ratepayers and Mileage
1899	34	Public Works Proposals
1899	47	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands
1899	61	Strahan Marine Board Inquiry: Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices
1899	71	The Great Western Railway and Electric Ore-Reduction Company Bill, No. 3, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices
1899	73	Statistics for the Year 1898
1900	34	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals
1900	44	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1899-1900
1900	63	Report of the Secretary for Mines for 1899-1900: Including Reports of the Inspectors of Mines
1900	67	Statistics for the Year 1899
1900	72	Central Board of Health: Report for the Year 1899
1901	12	Post and Telegraph Department: Report for 1900
1901	13	Tasmanian Government Railways: Report for 1900
1901	38	Statistics for the Year 1900
1901	42	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals
1901	43	Road Trusts and Town Boards, Assessments and Contributions, 1896-1900
1901	47	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report of the Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands, 1900-1901
1902	6	Finance, 1902
1902	19	Macquarie Harbour Works: Report by Napier Bell
1902	42	Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for 1901-2
1902	50	Macquarie Harbour Works: Report of Mr John Barrowman, Inspector for the Marine Board of Strahan, together with chart showing soundings taken on the Bar on July 8, 1902
1902	58	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1902
1902	67	Statistics for the Year 1901
1903	27	Statistics for the Year 1902

1903	29	Census, 1901
1903	31	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1902-3
1904	26	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for the Year 1903
1906	11	Report of the Secretary for Mines for the Year Ending December 31, 1905
1906	42	Statistics for the Year 1905-6
1906	46	Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for the Year Ended 30th June, 1906
1907	7	Report of the Secretary for Mines for Year Ending December 31, 1906
1907	20	The Great Western Railway and Electric Power Bill (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices
1908	2	Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1907
1908	13	Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for the Year Ended 30th June, 1908
1908	32	Statistics for the Year 1906-7
1908	39	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals
1909	21	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1908-9
1909	22	Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1908
1910	6	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals
1910	7	Ministerial Statement for the Minister for Mines
1910	22	Department of Lands & Surveys: Report for 1909-10
1911	5	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals, 1911
1911	17	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1910-11
1911	25	Engineer-in-Chief: Report for 1910-11
1911	28	Statistics for the Year 1910-11
1912	6	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Mines 1912
1912	13	Statistics for the Year 1911-12
1912	20	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1911-12
1913	2	Royal Commission on The North Mount Lyell Mining Disaster – Report of the Commissioner
1913	6	Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1912
1913	8	Report on the Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell Mines by A Montgomery
1913	14	Financial Statement of the Treasurer of Tasmania and Statement of the Minister of Railways and Minister of Agriculture, 1913-14
1913	15	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Mines 1913
1914	14	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1913-14
1914	23	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works and Agriculture
1914	24	Memorandum of Public Works Proposals
1914	25	Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1914

1914	35	Statistics for the Year 1913-14
1915	21	Statistics for the Year 1914-15
1915	22	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1914-15
1915	25	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Agriculture 1915
1916	23	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1915-16
1916	34	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1915-16
1917	17	Hydro-Electric Department, Report for 1916-17
1917	35	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Report on proposed preliminary works in connection with a Hydro-Electric Power Scheme at King River
1918	19	Engineer-in-Chief: Report for 1917-18
1918	27	Hydro-Electric Department, Report for 1917-18
1918	34	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1917-18
1918	36	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Agriculture and Minister Controlling Hydro-Electric Department, 1918
1919	34	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1918-19
1919	36	Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1919
1920	5	Report of the Secretary for Mines for the Year ending December 31, 1919
1920	12	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Lake St Clair to Gormanston Road Proposal
1920	31	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: General Report for the period from 1 <sup>st</sup> July, 1919, to 30 <sup>th</sup> June, 1920
1920	40	Department of Public Health Annual Report for 1919-20
1921	5	Statistics for the Year 1920-21
1921	14	Loans by the State to Local Bodies, 1921
1921	45	Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1920-21
1922	5	Report of the Acting-Secretary for Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1921
1922	24	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1921-22
1922	27	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1922
1922	37	Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1921-22
1923	14	Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Lands and Works, Minister for Agriculture and Minister Controlling the Hydro-Electric Department
1923	37	Department of Lands and Surveys: Report for 1922-23
1924	22	The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1924, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix
1924	31	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1924
1925	54	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1924-25
1926	25	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1926
1926	50	Secretary for Public Works: Report for 1924-25



1928	17	Ministerial Statement of the Minister of Lands, Works, and Agriculture, and Minister Controlling Forestry, 1928
1928	23	The North Mount Lyell & Macquarie Harbour Railway Bill, 1928, (Private): Report of Select Committee, with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendix
1928	40	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1928
1929	4	Report of the Director of Mines for Year Ending December 31, 1928
1929	38	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1929
1929	50	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1926-27
1930	5	Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1929
1931	3	Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ending December 31, 1930
1932	14	Report of the Government Railways for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June, 1932
1932	24	Director of Public Works: Report for Year 1931-32
1932	25	Report of the Forestry Department for the Year ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June 1932
1933	1	Education Department, Report for the Year 1932
1933	15	Report on the working of the Government Railways and Ferry Service for the Year Ended 30 <sup>th</sup> June, 1933
1933	35	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1931-32
1935	31	Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines 1935
1935	45	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1933-34
1936	5	Report of the Secretary for Mines 1935
1936	25	Ministerial Statement of the Minister for Mines, 27 October 1936
1937	48	Statistics of the State of Tasmania for the Year 1935-36

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Reid, AM, *The Dundas Mineral Field*, Department of Mines Geological Survey Bulletin No. 36, 1925

Twelvetrees, WH and Ward, LK, *The Ore-Bodies of the Zeehan Field*, Department of Mines Geological Survey Bulletin No. 8, 1910

Twelvetrees, WH, *The Progress of the Mineral Industry of Tasmania for the Quarter Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1905, 1906*, Mines Department

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*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 December 1901*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 30 June 1906*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter 31 December 1910*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 March 1911*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 30 June 1911*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 December 1911*

*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 March 1912*  
*The Progress of the Mineral Industry for the Quarter ending 31 March 1913*  
Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1914  
Report of the Secretary of Mines for the Year ending 31 December 1922

## **2.5 Zeehan School of Mines and Metallurgy**

*Annual Report 1905*, Zeehan, 1906

## **2.6 Government Maps**

Franklin 1, Parish of Turrah, County of Franklin, Reference Map 88001, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE), Hobart  
Franklin 2, County of Franklin, Vicinity of Mount Owen, Reference Map 88002, DPIWE, Hobart  
Lynchford L/73, amended to Queenstown Q/11A, DPIWE, Hobart  
Montagu Book 1, Vicinity of King River, DPIWE, Hobart  
Strahan S/63, Number 89473, DPIWE, Hobart  
Track Plan 48, DPIWE, Hobart

## **2.7 Newspapers and Periodicals**

*Advocate*  
*Age*  
*Argus*  
*Australian Mining Standard*  
*British Australasian*  
*Clipper*  
*Examiner*  
*Melbourne Herald*  
*Mercury*  
*Mount Lyell Standard*  
*The Banner*  
*The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*  
*Walch's Tasmanian Almanac*, 1890, 1892, 1901, 1903, 1904, 1905.  
*Williamstown Chronicle*  
*Zeehan & Dundas Herald*

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Clarke, M, *For the Term of his Natural Life*, Melbourne, United Press, undated.  
Fenton, J, *Bushlife in Tasmania*, reprint of 1891 edition with alterations, Launceston, Mary Fisher Bookshop, c. 1980.  
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